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*Lucas de San José*

# Holiness in the Cloister

OR

Commentaries on the Precautions of  
St. John of The Cross

Adapted from the Spanish

OF

Rev. Father Lucas of St. Joseph, O.C.D.

BY

Father Paschasius of Our Lady of  
Mount Carmel, O.C.D.

M. A. DONOHUE & CO.

701-733 S. Dearborn St.

Chicago, Ill.

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**Rev. Joseph Bruneau, S. S.**

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September 14, 1920

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Archbishop of Baltimore.

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## PREFACE

Three very powerful motives induced me to undertake the translation of "Santidad en el Claustro ó Comentarios a las Cautelas de San Juan de la Cruz," recently written and published by the Very Rev. Father Lucas of St. Joseph, our actual Superior Provincial in the United States.

The first motive is the great love and veneration I have for the ecstatic and famous mystical Doctor of Carmel, St. John of the Cross, whose writings enlighten the mind and move the will in a most astonishing way, gently leading the pious reader to put into practice the severe lessons contained in his heavenly books.

The second motive is the respect and filial affection I entertain for the Author of these Commentaries and of several other important works, one of which is "St. Teresa's Book Mark", so well known to many American Catholics.

And the last but not the least motive, is the great regard and admiration I foster in my heart for the many zealous Religious Communities and the intelligent and devout Catholics of this great country.

The desire of contributing my mite to the spiritual advancement of my American friends has induced me to undertake the translation of this Spanish work in asceticism, "Holiness in the Cloister or Commentaries on the Precautions of St. John of the Cross." And as I offer them the fruit of my arduous labor with sincere regards and affection, I beg their generous indulgence for all the deficiencies of my humble efforts.

FATHER PASCHASIUS of  
Our Lady of Mount Carmel, O. C. D.  
Washington, September 8, 1920.



## INTRODUCTION

I have been repeatedly asked by many of my friends to write something in continuation to my books, "Confidences to a Youth" and "From my Cell," that would do for the young who are already within the cloister what these did for those who are still in the world. Until the present, I never had a moment's leisure even to attempt to please my friends who honored me with such a request.

Divine Providence granted me a short period of rest in this great city, and I have devoted it to writing this little book, which I believe will serve, to a certain extent, the above mentioned purpose. This work, written in haste and without the necessary books for research, save the three or four which are quoted frequently, will be found somewhat deficient, especially in those points which are so familiar to all writers on the matter. As I am unable to give this book a rich and well-chosen erudition, it will appear as a very poor setting for that most precious literary and doctrinal gem, the "Cautelas"—Instructions—of St. John of the Cross, which it purposes to expound. Hence I recommend it as it is to the kindness of the reader.

Though this book is specially dedicated to the Religious of Carmel, I believe it may prove useful to all kinds of persons. I dedicated it in spirit to our young Religious Brothers and Sisters. I have thought often of them while writing it at the foot of the Crucifix. These pages belong especially to them, because they have been inspired by their holy prayers and enthusiasm, and I have written them with the consoling hope and even with the encouraging assurity that on *reading them* some of these young hearts, so full of life and hope, will feel renewed in spirit, and by loving more and more our Lord Jesus Christ, will be more useful to themselves as well as to the Order of our Lady. That such may be the case is the sole ambition of the author.

Washington, D. C., Feast of St. Peter Thomas.  
January 18, 1920.

## CHAPTER I

### CHILDREN OF ILLUSTRIOUS PARENTS

1. IN THE NAME OF JESUS—2. CHILDREN OF ILLUSTRIOUS PARENTS—3. JUDGE OF ONESELF—4. SPECIAL OBLIGATIONS—5. ORDER OF OUR LADY—6. ESTEEM OF ONE'S PROFESSION—7. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS OUR SPECIAL MASTER—8. FIVE MINUTES OF EXAMINATION—9. NEARLY ALWAYS AT THE TOP—10. BEGINNERS ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.

1. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that St. Paul wrought great miracles merely by invoking the holy Name of Jesus on the sick. Therefore many Jews admired those wonders and tried to cure the possessed by exorcizing the evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus saying, *I conjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth.* The most distinguished among all those who pretended to avail themselves of the name of Jesus and of the authority of St. Paul to cure the sick, were the seven sons of the High Priest Esceva. They were then exorcizing a poor man who was possessed by the devil; but the evil spirit answering said to them: *Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you? And the man in whom the wicked spirit was, leaping upon them, and mastering them both, prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.* (1)

(1) Acts XIX. 13-16.

Our Father St. John of the Cross makes the following short commentary on the aforesaid biblical passage: *This happened because they, the sons of Esceva, did not possess the required conditions; for the Lord is offended with those who teaching others the law of God, do not themselves keep it, and preaching to others the good spirit, they themselves have it not; therefore says St. Paul—Rom. xii, 21: “Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest not thyself.” And the Holy Ghost says through David: “But to the sinner God hath said; Why dost thou declare my justice, and take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hast hated discipline; and hast cast my words behind thee?—Ps. lxix. 16, 17.* It is therefore very reprehensible and perilous to assume to oneself the authority of a person without at the same time making the greatest efforts to assimilate his spirit.

2. We, the Carmelites, have very many and great external titles in which we may justly glory. We belong to a celebrated Order whose saints, our Founders and Reformers, are matchless, whose glories are most excellent, and whose graces can be counted by no one. Our dignity and even our own salvation demand of us great and continuous efforts that the spirit of each of us be conformable and in harmony with our great external titles. It would certainly be disgraceful if what was said of the wretched sons of Esceva could in truth and justice be said of us: *We know*



*the Gospel you proclaim and the Order to which you belong; we respect the habit you wear, and we venerate the great saints whose sons you esteem it a great honor to call yourselves. But apart from the habit you wear, and the Order that gave you your name, and the saints of whom you consider yourselves sons and successors and followers, we can not recognize you, we do not know who you are, we do not recognize your authority to speak to us in the name of those saints whom you do not imitate.*

It would not be the worst evil that men should speak thus to us; nor could it be any comfort that sometimes their judgment of us is favorable; for after all, it is not so very difficult to attain this at least temporarily. The name and the habit are still highly esteemed by men who ordinarily do not and can not penetrate very much below the surface. Their opinion about us will be according to what appears in us, and by the appearance and their impression they will judge us, and by judging us they will esteem or hate or despise us. But of themselves, appearance and habit and profession are worth little before God. His glance, infinitely quick and knowing, does not rest like the human gaze on our outward appearance, but penetrates into the innermost recesses of our soul. It reaches down to that mysterious *interior man* from whom we so often wish we could slip away, without however being able to separate ourselves wholly; for that interior

man is our own self, is our own consciousness, the source and confidant of the motives of all our actions; it can tell us our true spiritual condition, and this it certainly does whenever we listen in all sincerity to its voice.

Since God will condemn nobody, whose conscience has not admonished him that he was in the wrong; and since nobody who has come to the use of reason will be rewarded for good works of which his conscience has not approved; it follows that in truth and before God each one is spiritually only that what his conscience or the intimate voice of the interior man sincerely listened to, tells him he is. To know therefore what I am, and what is my spiritual condition, I must not attend to what others think or say about me, nor what my habit and my profession make me appear to be; but above all, I must attend to the dictates of my conscience. An austere habit, the name of a venerable order, the spiritual affiliation with celebrated saints, may possess great value as inducements to virtue, and may and generally do bring a certain right to special blessings of God and to a marked protection of the saints; nevertheless it is our own conscience which finally decides what we really are or are not.

3. Certainly much more is demanded from us religious than from those who live in the world. It is the people who do not practise virtue who are generally the most exacting with us who make profession of leading virtuous lives. Our holy



Mother warns us of this in the following notable passage; speaking of persons favored by God, the great saint says: *“Thousand eyes are watching that soul, while thousands of souls of another order are observed by none. . . . A soul which God permits to be thus seen by men may well prepare itself to be a martyr to the world; because if it will not die to the world voluntarily, that very world will kill it. Certainly I see nothing in the world that seems to me good except this, that it tolerates no faults in good people and helps them to perfection by dint of the complaints it makes of them. I mean, that it requires greater courage in one not yet perfect to walk in the way of perfection than to undergo an instantaneous martyrdom. For perfection is not attained at once unless God grants that grace by some special privilege; yet the world, when it sees any one beginning to travel on that road, insists on his becoming perfect at once, and at a thousand leagues’ distance it will detect in him a fault which after all may be a virtue. He who finds fault is doing the very same thing, and yet pronounces it so wrong in others. (2) We Carmelites rightly glory in the habit we wear, and in our spiritual relationship with those great saints of whom we are called sons and successors. But conscience will tell each one of us what is our true spiritual condition in the religious state we have embraced.*

(2) Life Chapt. XXXI.

4. It is not enough that my conscience does not reproach me as a man or a simple Christian, because God will judge me as a member of the Religious Order to which He called me and in which I vowed to serve Him. What would be enough for a simple Christian will not be enough for me a religious. And what would be excellent for a member of another religious order, may not be perfect for me who must aim at perfection according to the spirit of the Order which I embraced. It is true that perfection or sanctity considered in itself is always the same, just as the end of the same sanctity is one and the same; one Master showed the way to obtain it, and one and the same vitality nourishes and vivifies it. Jesus, the divine authority, pointed to God Himself as the sublime model of human perfection. *Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.* He also told us that in the house of His Father there are many mansions. And to those many mansions or degrees of the elect in heaven correspond the different degrees and even kinds of perfection to which each one must attain here below by fidelity to his particular and personal vocation, and to which are attached special graces of God, without which the greatest efforts of our will can avail little or nothing.

5. God calls us to be saints as St. Paul tells us; but He wants each of us to be holy in accordance with the spirit of our state and of the Order we have chosen. God in His divine economy enriched

with special gifts the founders or reformers of each Order since they were destined by Him to guide many others, and therefore they are the most perfect model for the members of that particular Order. All address their children with the words of St. Paul to the Philippians: *Be ye followers of me, brethren, and observe them who walk so as you have our model.* (3) Therefore our holy Mother St. Teresa used to say: *Let us remember our true founders, those holy fathers from whom we are sprung, for we know it was by the way of poverty and humility that they attained to the vision of God . . . if we say, as we do, that these are the beginning of a restoration of the rules of the Virgin Mother, our Lady and Patroness, let us not commit so great a wrong against her or against our holy fathers who have gone before us, as to fail to render our lives consistent with theirs.* And in another place she adds: *If any one thinks the rule hard, let her attribute the fault to her want of the true spirit and not to the rule of the house, seeing that delicate persons and those not in good health can bear it all with so much sweetness. Let others go to another monastery, where they may save their souls in the way of their own spirit.* (4)

This idea was firmly established in the mind and heart of the saint that by reforming her Order

(3) Philip III. 17.

(4) Life Chapt. 36.



she honored in a very special manner the Sovereign Queen of Heaven; therefore while writing of the first convent of the reform, that of St. Joseph of Avila, she said: *Our Lord grant that all may be to the praise and glory of Himself and the Virgin Mary, whose habit we wear, Amen.* And in another place: *I saw Christ who, it seemed to me, received me with great affection, placed a crown on my head, and thanked me for what I have done for His Mother.* And again: *When all of us remained in choir in prayer after Compline, I saw our Lady in exceeding glory in a white mantle with which she seemed to cover us all.* (5) And as if this were not enough, the Lord deigned to show her the great reward she had merited for having worked so much in the reformation of Blessed Mary's Order, for appearing Himself He addressed to her these consoling words: *Exert thyself, for thou seest how I help thee: I wished thou shouldst gain this crown. Thou wilt see in thy own days the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary much advanced.* (6) Therefore all the members of the Order of Carmel belong to the Order of the Blessed Virgin, and as children of the Blessed Virgin we must live.

6. The honor and even the safety of each religious consist mainly in a constant striving to bring their feelings and actions into harmony with

(5) Life Chapt. 36.

(6) Relat. 14.

the spirit and teachings of the saint, to whose institute they have voluntarily consecrated themselves. It is a sure sign that one is in danger of losing his vocation, if he has not already lost it, when he feels little affection and not much appreciation of the teachings of those saints, whom he chose as the masters and models of his spiritual life when he entered the Order they founded or reformed. Let him tremble with salutary fear, who in the hours of spiritual recollection, of peace, and of quiet of mind finds out that he has not yet acquired the spirit of those whom he calls his Fathers, nor that he habitually exerts himself to obtain their spirit. There is nothing in the religious life so useful as the questions each one puts to his own conscience regarding his actual spiritual condition. He ought to interrogate his conscience frequently and especially when his spirit is in peace; otherwise the noise of his environment or his own fretting will prevent him from listening to its dictates.

Let us attend then to what our Mother St. Teresa says, when speaking of those words of the OUR FATHER, Thy will be done, etc.: *To take care of giving good example to others, that it is not with words alone he must fulfill what he has vowed and promised, but it is the will of God he should keep his vows; that by giving scandal, he violates them though he may not entirely break them; that he has promised poverty and that he*



*ought to keep it without beating about the bush; this is what the Lord asked. (7)*

7. We Carmelites have for the model of our lives not only the most excellent mistress of the spiritual life, St. Teresa of Jesus, but also that incomparable mystical writer, the eloquent eulogist of God's love for souls, the keen and profound investigator of the most secret recesses of the human spirit, St. John of the Cross. From the summit of his symbolical Carmel this great psychologist and master of mystics, teaches and guides all those who aspire to the highest perfection, but he teaches and guides us specially who are honored with this habit and profession. Though this likeness of our habit and this nominal affiliation with the greatest and divinely inspired master of the spirit can honor us very much in the eyes of the world, it can never be a title for true glory if conscience truthfully accuses us, that in spirit we are as far removed from him and as unlike to him, as are those who lay no claims to either relationship of profession or of spiritual affiliation. It is a great truth that the habit alone neither sanctifies nor saves, but simply binds. The habit of Carmel honors a person highly, but at the same time it imposes serious obligations upon him. I do not believe there is a single Carmelite who does not appreciate as his highest distinction the right of calling St. John of the Cross

his Father and Master. No son or daughter of Carmel could live a single moment in peace if his conscience could accuse him of having degenerated; not one could bear the strain of the doubt, as to whether our holy Founders can apply to us those terrible words of St. John: *Though they were among us, for they went out from us, but they were not ours.* (8)

8. I believe sincerely that the best spent moments of our lives are those in which we compare our present spiritual condition with the spirit and teaching of our holy Father St. John of the Cross. We would quickly become saints if we examined ourselves daily for five minutes on the following points: "Am I a true Carmelite? Do I strive to live in private and in public according to the evangelical perfection and the peculiar spirit of our holy reformer, St. John of the Cross? If I had to appear now before God to give an account of my past life and vocation, could I have the courage to ask our holy Father to help me in return for my fidelity in trying to imitate his virtues and following faithfully his teaching? . . . No doubt this question would cause some uneasiness, but it would be a salutary uneasiness. It is better to suffer some hardship now than to lead a life of deception and pretense. It would be a great disappointment to have labored over what we fancied to be good, only to find that we have been mis-

(8) St. John. XI. 11-19.

taken, that we have lost precious time, that we have increased our responsibility by following our caprices and not acting according to the will of God.

Our holy Father says to us in one of his salutary counsels: *What does it avail to give to God one thing, when He wants another from you? Consider what God wants you to do, and do it, for you will satisfy your heart better in this way than by doing that to which you are inclined.* (9) Certainly we are not obliged to be saints, because this is an extraordinary grace given by God to whom He is pleased; but religious profession imposes on us as a very sacred obligation, as the chief aim of our life, the duty of making constant efforts to attain perfection or sanctity. It is evident that this effort should be directed not according to our whims and inclinations, but according to the spirit of our vocation. This spirit we must find in the teaching and lives of our holy reformers.

9. Our holy Father is the master given us by God to teach us the spirit of our vocation. From the heights of his mystical Carmel he shows us the paths by which we have to climb to the summit of perfection. God says of him to each one of us, what he said to Moses about the Tabernacle: *Look and make it according to the pattern shewn to thee in the mount.* (10) But our holy Father nearly always speaks from the highest summits of

(9) Max. 69.

(10) Exodus XXV. 10.



Carmel where his sight is lost, even for us who promised to follow him. Almost all his books are intended for souls who have already reached, or who are very near to intimate and supernatural union with God. It seems as if the Lord were impatient to communicate Himself to certain privileged souls; He does not wish to wait until the next life to disclose to them the infinite treasures of light and love which He has reserved for His elect. These souls enjoy such ineffable communications with the divine Goodness and are wont to immerse themselves in such a sea of light, that in some way they begin to taste here on earth the joys of the eternal beatitude. Ordinary souls cannot even suspect that such intimacy exists in this life between the Creator and His creature; and there are very few who reach to this high state of contemplation.

There is nobody who can surpass or even equal our Father St. John of the Cross in the explanation of these profound mysteries; he is par excellence the Mystic Doctor, the unmatched herald and preacher of God's love for men and man's love of God. To prepare souls for this divine union and guide them in its path, is the main purpose of all his writings; and therefore in accordance with this end, his conceptions and even his style are so sublime, that although his works are charming for lofty spirits, ordinary persons are discouraged and abandon his teaching.



10. But this discouragement and withdrawal from our Holy Father on account of his sublime doctrine, is unjust and perilous to souls. It would be really dangerous if any child of Carmel, persuaded that God did not call him to the state of contemplation, would forsake the teaching of our holy Father and try to find elsewhere the model of his religious profession. For though it may be true that many Carmelites will never ascend to the summit of contemplation, which after all is not necessary in order to be very virtuous or even a great saint, and the Lord gives it and takes it from whomsoever and whenever He wishes; it is also true, that none of us can consider himself free from the sacred obligation of studying and putting into practice that solid, austere, and vigorous Carmelite asceticism which was characteristic of our Holy Father, and which has given so many saintly souls to heaven and so many sincere friends to humanity. Our holy Father is not only a great mystic Doctor, but also a perfect master of an admirable asceticism. It is true he dwells generally on the mystic heights of Carmel, where none can follow him but the souls who can fly like royal eagles; but he does not forget the weaklings, who in the matter of religious perfection, are still on the hillocks of the mystic mountain. The saint, in a very original and laconic manner, tells us also all that we need to know and practise to be very good and true Carmelite saints.

A renowned master and most original in asceti-

cism no less than in mysticism, is our Father St. John of the Cross. His little book the “Cautelas”—Precautions—enchant some as much as his famous works, the “Ascent of Mount Carmel,” the “Dark Night,” and the “Spiritual Canticle.” Let the great genius and mystic revel at his pleasure in these sublime books; some of us who are on the first hillocks of this spiritual mountain can but look up with noble and holy emulation to those who have arrived at its highest tops, while we entertain ourselves with the study and meditation of these few pages of our holy Father. These are the first plants and flowers which are found in the very entrance to this mystical mountain in this delightful garden of the soul. To study them, to inhale more fully their vivifying fragrance, to assimilate them better, and to help others as far as we can, is the sole end we propose to ourselves in writing this Commentary. As it is a noble and very useful occupation, it is enough to assimilate well the teaching of these few pages to become a perfect religious and to attain unto holy peace.

This little book which in the large edition of the works of the saint covers scarcely six pages, contains all that a soul consecrated to God in a religious order needs to know and to practise to reach the highest perfection. Whoever will practise these “Cautelas”—Precautions—will be a true child of St. John of the Cross. If any one despises the doctrine contained in these pages or makes little effort to put it into practice, I do not

know how he can be called a Carmelite, because it contains the true spirit of Carmel, as we shall see clearly when we have studied it more carefully.

## CHAPTER II

### ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE PRECAUTIONS

1. PREFACE BY THE SAINT.—2. ABRIDGEMENT OF PERFECTION.—3. THE WORLD AND ITS PRINCIPAL INDUCEMENTS. THREE COUNSELS CONCERNING THEM.—4. THE DEVIL AND HIS THREEFOLD TEMPTATIONS AGAINST GOOD PERSONS.—5. THREE COUNSELS IN REGARD TO THESE.—6. OUR OWN NATURE AND ITS BAD INCLINATIONS.—7. LAST THREE “CAUTELAS.”—8. MOST SUBLIME PERFECTION ACCESSIBLE TO ALL.

1. The most sublime perfection which religious persons can acquire by faithfully observing the counsels or “Precautions” of our Father St. John of the Cross, the facility with which they can obtain it, the order they should observe, the intense joy and the complete safety in which they live who reach those heights of virtue, all are explained by the Saint in his brief and admirable Preface to the “Cautelas” or “Precautions.” *If any religious desires to attain in a short time to holy recollection, spiritual silence, detachment, and poverty of spirit, where peaceful rest of the spirit is enjoyed and union with God attained; if he desires to be delivered from all hindrances which created things put in his way, to be defended against all the wiles and illusions of Satan, and to be protected against himself, he must strictly practise the following instructions.*



*If he will do this with ordinary attention, without any other effort or practice, and at the same time carefully observe the obligations of his state he will advance rapidly to great perfection, acquire all virtue, and attain unto holy peace. All the evils to which the soul is subject proceed from the three enemies already mentioned; the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we can hide ourselves from these we shall have no combats to fight. The world is less difficult and the devil more difficult to understand, but the flesh is the most obstinate of all and the last to be overcome together with the old man. If we do not conquer the three, we shall never perfectly conquer one; and if we conquer one, we shall also conquer the others in the same proportion.*

2. These "Cautelas" or Precautions of the Mystic Doctor contain nine counsels which constitute a complete treatise of Christian and religious perfection. By them man is cautioned against the different enemies of his sanctification. No miracles, virtues, or penances are needed, because these counsels suffice not only for our salvation, but also for the attainment of the highest spiritual perfection. Whoever in spirit and truth keeps all and each of these precautions will surely be a great saint, for our holy Father says: *He who observes these counsels with ordinary attention, without other efforts or other practices, and without failing in the obligations of his state, will*

*advance rapidly to great perfection, acquire all virtues and attain unto holy peace.*

Before commencing the study of the nine precautions in particular, we deem it advisable to consider them together, though briefly, that the reader may easily see their order and the connection they have with each other as well as their direct opposition to the three enemies of the soul, against which they were written by our holy Father. We know from the catechism we learned during our early years that the world, the flesh, and the devil are the three great enemies of man. But these words are so much used by pious persons that through constant repetition they have lost their meaning; let us consider for a moment their possible relation to our spiritual condition.

Water washes and purifies, but the surface of the rocks over which it glides is not always preserved pure and glossy, for substances that soil and disfigure are easily deposited there. In like manner words are the means which God has given us to purify and sanctify ourselves and to communicate to one another light, truth, and love. But when we often repeat the same words, they pass through our ears and over our lips without leaving anything useful to our souls; on the contrary they produce in us the bad habit of listening and speaking through routine, the great enemy of both spiritual discipline and perfection. For every hundred times we pronounce the words world, flesh, and devil, perhaps ninety-nine times

we say them through routine, that is without paying attention to their true meaning. Let us see now what St. John of the Cross understands by these words and how he connects them with our weakest and most vulnerable traits.

3. By the world he does not mean those persons or things which are openly bad or contrary to virtue, because the saint supposes and with much reason that souls consecrated to God are on the watch against all which is openly bad. Our holy Father understands by the world all those persons and things which, besides our own selves and the devil, against whom he gives us especial instructions, can be an impediment to our spiritual perfection. And this happens whenever such persons or things are the motive for beginning or developing in us, first some affections towards particular persons which, without being actually sinful—for we are not speaking here of such things—are not completely in accordance with the adorable designs of God on these souls that are in a special manner consecrated to Him; second, some excessive desires for temporal goods; third, a certain restlessness or imprudent solicitude which induces us to interfere in affairs especially domestic ones, which are not entrusted to us. Hence these three precautions or counsels are directed against any disorderly affection to persons, against an excessive solicitude for temporal goods, and a restless attention to affairs



not entrusted to us. The saint then summarizes as follows:

First Precaution: *Do not love one man more than another, for if you do you will fall into error, because you do not know who is more worthy of love; but if you strive to forget all men alike, as holy recollection requires you to do, you will escape every error whether great or small.* Second Precaution: *Do not be solicitous about what you eat or drink or wear, or about any created thing whatever. . . . If you do this you will attain unto silence and have peace in your senses.* Third Precaution: *Be careful never to let your mind dwell upon, still less your tongue speak of, what is passing in the community or of any religious in particular. Because if you give heed to what is going on, even if you lived among the angels, many things would seem to you not to be good because you do not understand them.*

4. The devil is another actor against whom we must guard ourselves most carefully. Although he is extraneous to us, he can and does interfere much and with great subtlety in our affairs and intimate personal feelings. It is true, that unless we permit him he cannot have any power over us, for God created us free and our liberty is our own. No created being can force us against our will, but the evil spirit possesses tremendous power over us by his suggestions, and if we are not very watchful and prayerful, he



can easily enter into the most secret recesses of our being and cause innumerable evils.

The vitality of a religious order consists in the harmony with which the different members perfectly unite all their energy towards a determined object; and the first condition for a religious to advance in virtue is that he should know how to adapt himself perfectly to the character of his congregation, and that he should display all his activity and personal qualities, few or many, within the prescribed limits of his particular institute. In this way his personality may not be very conspicuous; perhaps he may even be lost in the multitude; it may also never be known who had the principal share in the performance of a good work. In this manner the actions of the religious will be less brilliant, they may not possess the fascination of singularity, but they will be more efficacious and also more useful for himself and for his congregation.

We all carry in the depths of our soul a dose of pride, the effect of the vicious habits caused by the fall of our first parents. This pride, generally unnoticed by ourselves—and its acknowledgment is always so hard—induces us most powerfully to act singularly, and to mingle in the least possible degree our actions with those of the community. It impels us to singularity, which is one of the greatest enemies of personal perfection, as well as of the corporation to which the religious belongs. The devil is familiar with this weak point

in our nature; therefore he exploits it to the detriment of our virtue, he quickens the feelings of pride, and in a very cunning way that we do not suspect his diabolical influence, he fomenta a dangerous sensitiveness within us. In many details of religious life he suggests and even makes us believe: First, that by following our personal inclinations and our particular tastes, we can do more good than by pursuing the common path of regular observance or that appointed by the superior; second, that the superior is not prudent in some of his arrangements; third, that he does not understand us, or that he is determined to humble us, or at least that there is some negligence in encouraging our legitimate hopes, or heeding our opinions which are very reasonable.

5. Our holy Father advises us that it is very difficult to notice the diabolical interference in these susceptibilities of self-love, because they are so well concealed. Therefore to stop the evil spirit in the very beginning when he introduces himself so cunningly, the saint gives us three counsels or precautions.

The fourth precaution and the first against the devil is: *Never set about doing anything, however good and charitable it may be, either for yourself or for anybody else, except under obedience, or that you are bound to do it by the rule of your Order; because the actions of a religious are not his own but those of obedience, and if he withdraws them from the control of obedience, he*

*will have to give an account of them as lost. The fifth precaution and the second against the devil counsels as follows: Never look upon your superior, whoever he may be, otherwise than if you were looking upon God, because he stands in His place. . . . I tell you that a great many religious are ruined in the way of perfection for not looking upon their superiors as they ought. The sixth precaution and the third against the devil reads: Strive with all your heart after humility in thought, word, and deed, taking more pleasure in others than in yourself, wishing sincerely they may be preferred to you in all things.*

8. Besides the detriment which persons, things with their charms, and the devil with his temptations can cause us, we must be watchful against ourselves, since we have many cravings and dislikes that we must control and regulate. Our nature, so weakened by the sin of our first parents and more or less impoverished by personal transgressions in each one of us, requires continual study and watchfulness. We deny a patient, no matter how dear he may be to us, many things he most ardently longs for, because his caprices are dangerous to himself. We are all more or less morally sick, and therefore with more or less intensity and more or less unconsciously, we all suffer from certain hallucinations. These can be reduced to two principal ones from which all the rest proceed. First: We pretend to make our poor person the center round which all the rest must move,



especially those with whom we live more intimately. If this natural inclination is not prudently but energetically restrained, it will prove a most prolific source of faults and of innumerable grievances and sufferings. Without the habit of self-control man will be overcome, and perhaps unconsciously, on account of this evil inclination.

With this selfishness in our spirit we naturally feel an aversion for all those about us who do not think, feel, and act as we do; our self-love would have them think, feel, and act differently. This aversion can have countless degrees. From that first almost imperceptible movement of a contradiction from a dear friend to the violent outburst of an intense hatred against a powerful enemy, there may be so many and such variegated aversions in the human heart, that it is impossible to classify them exactly or to reduce them to any number.

7. Against this destructive hallucination, this enemy of our peace, of our heart, of charity, and of justice, our Father St. John of the Cross gives us admirable advice. He counsels us to consider the persons about us from the true and safe point of view and according to the intentions of Divine Providence. He says in his seventh precaution, which is the first against the flesh: *You must understand that you are come to the monastery for no other purpose than to be exercised and polished by every one. . . . There are officers who will*



*polish you by thoughts, words, and deeds which are opposed to your inclinations.*

A second hallucination from which we suffer nearly always unconsciously, is to regard the pleasure we find in the execution of our actions as their rule and end. In this way we mistake the pleasure for the obligation. This is of course not our intention, but practically this is the secret of a great number of our actions and of their omissions. We cannot deny that generally we execute punctually and diligently what is pleasing to us, whereas we are very slow in the fulfillment of a multitude of little obligations which displease us, and often we imagine ourselves dispensed from performing them at all. Against this inclination our holy Father gives his last two precautions which embody a most severe asceticism, and for the same reason the exact fulfillment of them without any other virtues and miracles would suffice to make us great saints. For the Saint says: *Never omit any practices because they are disagreeable, neither observe them because they are pleasant, provided they are for the service of God. The spiritual man must seek in his actions what is unpleasant and troublesome rather than what is sweet and agreeable; otherwise he will never destroy self-love nor acquire the love of God.*

8. What our holy Father intended with his famous "Cautelas" was to lead his sons and daughters to the highest perfection, and this in a simple and easy way. There is nothing here which

is not within the reach of all, for the saint directs himself to the interior man; he wants, above all, the penance of the reason and the discipline of the spirit. Every one, whatever may be his temperament, his education or his occupation, can keep these precautions, for there is no question here of rigorous penances, of great works, or of many prayers, of much reading, and long hours of meditation. The saint limits himself to regulating our affections and solitudes towards persons and temporal goods which he calls by the generic term world, to guard us against the suggestions of the devil and against the most subtle insinuations of self-love which he calls the flesh.

When these three enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, are conquered after this manner, the soul has no more enemies to fight, because she is raised so high that no creature can overtake her, and she begins even in this life to enjoy the consolations of the Holy Ghost. It seems proper to reproduce in its entirety the text of each precaution before beginning with due reverence its commentary.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST PRECAUTION AGAINST THE WORLD

#### OUR NEIGHBOR

1. WORDS OF THE SAINT.—2. APPARENT HARSHNESS AND ERRONEOUS OPINIONS.—3. SPIRITUAL EDUCATION. MODEL OF A GOOD EDUCATOR.—4. HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE MIND OF A HOLY WRITER.—5. DEFECTS IN THE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SAINTS.—6. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND HIS SOCIAL MANNERS.—7. HIS LETTERS.—8. HE SHOWED HIMSELF IN THEM AS HE WAS.—9. THE AUTHOR OF THE LETTERS DOES NOT SEEM TO BE THE SAME AS THE ONE OF THE “PRECAUTIONS.”—10. NEED OF AN EXPLANATION.—QUOTATION FROM ST. TERESA.

1. *To escape perfectly from the evils which the world can inflict, you must observe three things: The first is, preserve an equal love and an equal forgetfulness of all men, whether relatives or not; withdraw your affections from the former as well as from the latter, and even more from the former on account of the ties of blood, for the natural affection which men feel for their kindred always subsists. This affection must be mortified if you want to acquire spiritual perfection. Consider all your kindred as strangers, and in this manner you will better discharge your duty to them, than by giving them the affection which you owe to God.*

*Do not love one man more than another, for if you do, you will fall into error. He is worthy of more love whom God loves more, and you do not*

*know who he is. But forget all of them alike—as holy recollection requires you to do—and you will free yourself from the error of loving them too much or too little. Do not think about them, good or evil. Avoid them as much as you can. If you do not observe this, you will never become religious, nor will you ever attain to holy recollection, nor free yourself from your imperfections: If you take any liberties here, Satan will in some way or other deceive you or you will deceive yourself under the pretence of good or evil. You will be safe in following this direction, for in no other way you can free yourself from the imperfections and escape the hindrances which your soul encounters in its intercourse with creatures.*

2. The teaching contained in this precaution against the world will doubtless seem very severe to many persons.

*Detach your heart from your relatives and from those who are not; but still more from your relatives. . . . Regard them all as strangers. Do not love one person more than another. Forget all of them alike. Do not think about them, either good or evil, and if you do not observe this, you will never become true religious.*

These words taken literally and without any explanations may cause certain tender souls who hear them, to experience a sensation of coldness which will perhaps deprive them of every sympathy for the holy Doctor of Carmel and lead them to discontinue the read-



ing of his books. We believe this and similar passages have deprived our holy Father of many friends. A religious, highly esteemed and venerated, was asked once how this passage of the saint should be understood. The good religious answered sincerely: "I do not understand it well. I have been asked very often about it by respectable persons and I did not know how to answer them. To my way of thinking, our holy Father wrote these precautions for the novices only, for apart from the novitiate and the college, I cannot see how they could be observed faithfully."

Behold what may be considered a lamentable error. Though it is certain that our holy Father wrote these famous "Cautelas" *exclusively for the novices*, we can not admit that the great reformer and educator would give the young religious entrusted to him instructions of a temporary character, instructions they could not take for their rule of life, not only during the time of their religious formation, but for all the remainder of their lives. These precautions do not contain merely disciplinary dispositions which vary indefinitely according to circumstances to which the religious has to adapt himself like everybody else.

3. These instructions, as is clear by simply perusing them, tend to the formation of the interior man, to the formation of the conscience of a religious. This interior formation which constitutes the true character, the true moral personal-

ity of man, must be the same in all conditions and circumstances of human life. Every man must accommodate himself to the various circumstances he encounters, and to the different characters with whom he has to deal and live; but never without lowering himself can he renounce his moral personality. The religious can be the most complaisant of men, he can adapt himself to everybody and to everything. This was the motto of St. Paul, to know how to live with all in order to gain all: *I became all things to all men, that I may save all.* (1) But our adjustment to all things and to all men does not dispense with the obligation of appearing and being true religious. This would be to fail in the most fundamental duty of a religious, which is to conduct himself always in such a way that all may respect him, his profession, and his order.

The object of the true educator is to form in his disciples this interior man, who is always conscious of his actions, this moral personality, so flexible that without any violence it can accommodate itself to all things, and yet so strong that no person or thing can weaken it. St. John of the Cross, who was providentially destined for the reformation of this ancient and venerated Order, as well as for the education of its first members, was a man of great practical talent and holiness and endowed with the gifts of a perfect educator. There is no

(1) I. Cor. XI. 22.

doubt that Divine Providence enriched him with all the conditions necessary to form the hearts of those who were so fortunate as to be his disciples. The saint educated them, not precisely for the time of their novitiate—for this he left most wise disciplinary rules, adaptable to time and circumstances—but for their whole religious life and which they in their turn were to transmit to others. And therefore, even allowing that these precautions were written for the first novices of the Reform, we can never admit that he instilled into their tender hearts a doctrine useful only during their novitiate. Neither can we believe that the teaching of our holy Father to his children is so hard as the literal sense of the above passages seems to indicate.

4. We can not judge of the mind of a writer from a few passages of his works, no matter how decisive they may seem to be. It is above all necessary to attend to the prevailing ideas of his writings. If the writer is a saint and treats of spiritual matters, it is proper to consider his actions, since the saints are the most consistent men in the world; and therefore their conduct is the most perfect reflection of their mind on all practical questions. Consequently, if we can demonstrate that our holy Father did not forget the persons with whom he had to deal, but on the contrary was always most solicitous to procure whatever could be of service to them; nor that he was cold and indifferent, but very affectionate to-

wards them; we can conclude that it is not absolute forgetfulness, nor indifference, nor disregard for every one that he wished his first novices of the Reform to take as the standard of their lives, and to transmit to future generations as the genuine expression of the spirit of our first Father.

5. It is true that the biographies of the saint still extant, or at least those that were at our disposal, do not express the real moral physiognomy of our Father St. John of the Cross; they have the common defect of almost all biographies. It is difficult to understand why the writers, especially of certain epochs, have a mania for presenting the great masters of religion so far removed from real, human, and practical life, the life which is common to saints and to us. They narrate with all detail the extraordinary and miraculous actions of the saints, but they do not tell us how they executed their simple, every day actions, and it is precisely by these practices that they were sanctified. They do not show us their intimate personality; they do not allow us to see their mind and their heart which were the real compelling forces of their conduct and which gave all the value to their actions, to the most stupendous as well as to the most simple and common actions of the saints.

When we read such lives, we learn the many wonderful things they accomplished, but not what they were. With such narrations we can not know those great characters, which were at the same



time so sublime and so simple, so nearly divine and yet so human, because energetic personal exertion and the divine grace—which destroys nothing but rather embellishes and sanctifies all that it touches—purified them from all the ugliness and disorder caused by sin. We can not then learn from the biographies what was the heart of our holy Father. We can not really know if he was cold and indifferent towards the persons with whom he had connections, and whether he considered them all as strangers and kept himself in perfect forgetfulness, as his advice in the first precaution seems to indicate.

6. Fortunately St. John of the Cross, though a great lover of solitude, was not a hermit who could pass his life without any human intercourse, and who could live like the stars of the firmament or the wild beasts of the woods without the company of created beings. St. John of the Cross as the reformer of a religious order, as the founder of a great number of convents both for friars and nuns, during many years a prelate and the director of numerous souls, could but allow us—though against his own will—a glimpse of his noble soul. And there we certainly behold him very sensible, solicitous, affectionate and paternal towards those persons who had the good fortune to be in any way connected with the holy Carmelite.

7. The private and confidential letters of a writer reflect his soul better than all his other works put together. When we believe ourselves

removed from the suspicious looks of strangers and even from the sight of the person with whom we speak, we deem ourselves dispensed from certain circumspections which we use in public and even in familiar conversations. But in our private and intimate correspondence we manifest ourselves as we are; we place our whole soul into intimate contact with the soul of our friend. It is this that renders the epistolary correspondence of the saints so instructive, interesting, and charming. The correspondence of our saint was necessarily very extensive; for, as we have said, he had to deal with so many persons. But unfortunately nearly all these literary and doctrinal relics perished in the fierce tempest that was raised against him. However, Divine Providence did not permit that all should perish; some entire letters and fragments of others were saved and collected with religious piety by his children. These provide us the means of contemplating at present the grandeur of the saint's heart and also of understanding the true sense of some passages in his writings.

8. Let us see if the correspondence of St. John belongs to the commercial type, that is, does he limit himself strictly to the motive or the business of the correspondence, showing himself entirely forgetful and indifferent to all other matters and to the person himself? According to the literal sense of his first precaution this should be the case, but the reader may be sure that the saint

acted differently. In a letter to a nun he laments bitterly, though with resignation, that since they imprisoned him he had not seen his great Mother Teresa of Jesus, nor his brethren in religion; these are his own words: *Jesus be in your soul, my daughter! Though I do not know where you are, I wish to write to you these lines, trusting that our Mother will forward them to you, if you are not with her. And if it is so that you are not with her, then console yourself with me who are more exiled and lonely than you. For since I was swallowed by that whale and cast forth upon this distant shore, I have not been worthy of seeing her nor the saints who are down there. God has done it for our good; for loneliness is a file, and to suffer darkness is the way to great light.* (2)

It is a great pity that his letters to St. Teresa, his great Mother, at the same time his teacher and disciple, are lost. But from what he says in this letter we can infer what we all hold for certain, namely, that the author of the precautions entertained for St. Teresa a little more affection and even filial tenderness than he generally did for all the rest. We can not believe him indifferent in his affection to this great saint.

To a pious lady he wrote as follows: *All your letters have been received. I have shared in all your grief, trials, and desolations, which are calling on me with so many voices that my pen cannot*

(2) Let. to Mother Cath. of Jesus.



*express them all. All are rapping and knocking at my soul for more love, which will cause more prayers and spiritual sighs to ascend to God that He may grant what my soul is asking. He requests the same lady to write to him more frequently, and he tells her that her letters should not be so short. To the same person: Thanks be to God, Who has given me the grace not to forget the poor as you tell me; it would pain me much to think that you believe what you say. It would be bad enough after so many marks of kindness. This only was wanting to me now to forget you; but how is this possible since you are present to my soul? (3)*

9. Does it seem as if these passages were written by another than the author of the first precaution against the world? Nevertheless the writer is one and the same, and the spirit that animates them is one and the same. It is very certain that our holy Father never contradicted his teaching by his conduct, nor pretended to teach his children what he himself did not practice. But in this great lover of the cross one finds his very sweetness always concealed in his profound spirit of abnegation. The following is a fragment of one of his admirable letters to the Sisters of Beas: *Jesus, Mary be with your souls, my daughters in Christ. Your letter greatly consoled me, and may our Lord reward you for it. My delay in writing*



*has not been from want of good will, for truly, I wish you all good, but because it seemed to me that enough has been said and written to effect all that is needful. . . . Never fail, no matter what befall you, be it good or evil, to keep your hearts calm in the tenderness of love, that you may suffer in all circumstances. Because perfection is so momentous and so priceless is spiritual joy, may God grant that all these be enough; for it is impossible to make any progress but by acting and suffering all in silence. I have experienced, my daughters, that the soul which is ready to talk and converse with men, is not very ready to converse with God; for if it were, it would be at once drawn forcibly inwards, it would love silence and avoid all conversation; for God wants the soul to rejoice in Him rather than in any creature, however excellent and profitable it may be. I commend myself to your holy prayers, and be assured that, imperfect as my charity is, it is so bound up in you that I can never forget you to whom I owe so much in the Lord. (4)*

10. In the next chapter we shall try to explain the genuine meaning of the first precaution against the world, for it is very sure that under the hard literal appearance which chills the soul, there is much sweetness and charity. But before proceeding to the commentary, let us glance at two of the most beautiful passages of our great

Mother St. Teresa of Jesus, which illustrate this matter most clearly.

*When my brothers came—and to one of them I owe so much—I did not fail to stay with him and to treat with him of all that was conducive to his spiritual and temporal welfare. All caused me fatigue and pain; and as I was offering it to the Lord, and thinking I was obliged to do all this, there came to my mind that it is written in our Constitutions, that we must avoid our kindred. I then asked myself if I was acting contrary to my obligations, and the Lord said to me: No daughter, for your institutions will advance according to my law only. (5)*

According to this beautiful passage of St. Teresa it is very clear that neither virtue nor the rule of the institute forbid affection to our kindred or to any other person. But it is necessary to avoid disorder in our affections and not the affection itself, because love of our neighbor is laudable and holy in itself.

Here is the other passage of the saint: *I was one day thinking whether it was a want of detachment in me that led me to take pleasure in the company of those who had the care of my soul, to have an affection for them, and to comfort myself with those whom I see to be very great servants of God. Our Lord said to me: It is not virtue in a sick man to abstain from thanking and loving*

*the physician who seems to restore him to health when he is in danger of death. What should I have done without these persons? The conversation of good people was never hurtful; my words should always be weighed and holy. . . . This was a great comfort to me, because now and then I wished to abstain from converse with all people; for it seemed to me that I was attached to them. (6)*

Let us see now how the doctrine of St. John of the Cross is to be understood, in order to regulate our own heart that in its affections it may not deviate from the right course.

(6) Life Chapter LX.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CONTINUATION OF THE SAME

1. CREATION OF LIFE ACCORDING TO THE HOLY DOCTOR OF CARMEL.—2. HE DISLIKES HEARTLESS MEN.—3. BROTHERLY LOVE THE SUPPORT AND PLEDGE OF THE LOVE OF GOD.—4. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS A POET OF THE HEART.—5. BROAD HORIZON OF THE SPIRIT AND OF THE HEART.—6. TRIPLE CHARACTER OF THE LOVE OF THE SAINTS.—7. AUTO-PORTRAIT OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—8. POVERTY OF THE HUMAN HEART AND A POWERFUL RE-AGENT.—9. UNIVERSAL LOVE AND MOST PRUDENT ADVICE. — 10 CHILDISH MEN AND THE CURATIVE SYSTEM OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—11. NO RIGHT TO COMPLAIN OF EXCESSIVE RIGOR.—12. COLDNESS OF THE HEART.—13. MORAL DISTINCTIONS.

1. There is no doubt that St. John of the Cross, notwithstanding any impression the simple reading of the first precaution may make on us, did not condemn a pure and orderly affection for others. He himself loved most tenderly all who had the good fortune of knowing him. And so far was he from condemning this legitimate expansion of the heart, that it may well be said that the most tender love found in the austere penitent of Duruelo its best apostle and eulogist in modern times. Nobody represented to his own mind and sang so delicately to all creation such a can-



ticle as did St. John of the Cross. His poetic and saintly soul considers all creatures as gifts conferred by the hand of God. And if he treats of them, it is that they should talk to him of love and help him to love more; it is to conjure them, saying to them all, to the flowers, the birds, the mountains, and the forests:

*If you shall see  
Him whom I love,  
Tell Him I languish, suffer and die,  
In search of my love.  
I will go over mountains and strands.  
Nor have I any other employment.  
My sole occupation is love.*

According to the saint, life is of value only insofar as it teaches, exercises, and purifies our love. This idea he deemed worthy of an entire book, the "Spiritual Canticle," on which no commentary will be made, so as not to belittle it or to deprive the reader of the pleasure of musing and meditating upon it: *In the evening of life you will be examined as to your love.* If he so highly recommends retirement from people, to use his own words: *blessed recess of the heart*, it is certainly not in the sense of crushing and extinguishing the emotions; on the contrary, when they are purified in silence and retirement, they glow more brightly in divine love.

2. It is not frozen hearts nor cold souls that St. John of the Cross seeks; for him sweetness of

spirit and tenderness of soul are effects of the love of God in us, whereas callousness he considers the fruit of pride: *The loving soul, he says, is gentle, meek, humble, and patient. The soul hardened in self-love hardens itself still more. If Thou in Thy love, O good Jesus! dost not make the soul gentle, it will persist in its natural hardness.* (1) If some contend that this and similar passages of the saint are to be understood only of the love of God, we answer in the well-known and vigorous words of Holy Scripture, which call the man who says he loves God without loving also his neighbor, a liar: *If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother; he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not? And this commandment we have from God, that he, who loveth God, love also his brother.* (2) St. John of the Cross has in different parts of his works some very decisive passages on this matter, which would seem at first sight contrary to the precaution we are trying to explain: *Who does not love his neighbor hates God.* (3)

3. So far is the saint from condemning affection for others, provided it is pure and well-ordered according to God, that as a learned theologian and a deep observer of the human heart, he wants our love of God to be founded on our

(1) Max. 27-28.

(2) I. St. John IV. 20, 21.

(3) Max. 9.

love for the neighbor, and that these two loves, the divine and the human, should uphold each other and grow and fructify in perfect harmony. Here are the actual words of this great spiritual master, as well versed in the noble aspirations of the human heart as in its dangerous weaknesses. *When the love and the affection we give to a creature is purely spiritual and founded on God, divine love grows with it, and the more we remember the creature, so much the more we also remember God; the one grows apace with the other.* (4)

This teaching will certainly not frighten any sensible, tender, and pure heart. It is necessary, however, to attend to this other advice of the prudent master, so as not to misunderstand his doctrine. *When the affection for a creature springs from sensual vice or from purely natural inclination, in proportion to its increase, is the diminution of the love of God and the forgetfulness of His presence; and from the recollection of the creature comes remorse of conscience. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit, says our Lord in His Gospel. And thus love, born of sensuality, ends in sensuality, and that which is born of the spirit ends in the spirit of God, and makes it grow. This is a sign by which we may distinguish between these two affections.* (5)

(4) Max. 184.

(5) Max. 185-186.

In confirmation of this teaching of our holy Father let us consider the following beautiful passage of our holy Mother St. Teresa: *Ask the Lord for these two things only: love of His Majesty and love of the neighbor; for it can not be known definitely whether we love God or not, although there are many signs to indicate that we love Him; but the love for our neighbor is easily known. Be sure that as you advance in this, you will grow much more in the love of God. The love that His Majesty has for us is so great, that in reward for that which we have for our neighbor, He will in a thousand ways cause our charity to Himself to grow; of this I can not doubt.* (6)

4. Our holy Father then is not an enemy of love. Because he is a saint, he is also the most vigorous defender and promoter of love. And because he is at the same time a great saint and a poet, he sings and extols it with canticles full of truth and harmony. The vehement desire of all his life, his providential and characteristic mission, was not to restrain the noble and legitimate emotions of the human heart, but to raise souls to very high perfection and this in a safe and easy manner while uniting them most intimately with God. For this reason he wants to purify them, not only from sensual and sinful affections, but also from every affection and natural inclination which has not its proximate origin and its imme-



diate end in God. But he does not wish to elevate them to this height to remain there in a stoic quietism, in dreamy forgetfulness of all things, living morally and intellectually as if they were so many mummies.

No, this is not the teaching of St. John of the Cross: it is just the reverse. He wants hearts thus purified that with greater innocence, with more liberty and energy, they may love not only God, but also in God and for God all that is pure, just, and lovable like God. *All our good works must have their origin in the highest love of God, if they are to be pure and innocent.* And more beautifully still, if possible, he says in another place: *The soul that loves is neither wearied nor wearies, and He who knows how to die to all will find life in all.* (7)

5. The higher the eagle soars, the greater the freedom with which it flies, and the more piercing is its sight; the same happens to a spiritual person. When we love through interest or on account of some special sympathy, the motive of our love is too low, narrow, and confined, and consequently the action of our heart is also low, poor, and narrow; the heart in such a person is easily contracted and there remains no strength for higher love. But when a man's first and principal motive to love others is the love of God, that is, when he puts aside all personal conditions and

(7) Max. 123, 152.

loves them affectionately because they are children of God, because God loves them and He commands us to love them as ourselves, then our spiritual vision is infinitely enlarged, our heart acquires great liberty, and with the liberty come strength and energy to love the entire human family. Therefore St. Teresa, speaking of a soul that has reached some degree of perfection, says: *The love of the world is removed from her; self-affection is converted into disaffection, and the love she had for her relatives is transformed into the love of God; while the love of her neighbors and of her enemies is greatly increased.* (8)

The nearer a man approaches to God by holiness of life, the more he is like to God; for, as our holy Father says in his inimitable style: *The soul that endeavors to divest itself for the love of God of all that is not God, is soon enlightened and transformed into God, in such a way that it resembles God Himself, and seems to have all that God has.* (9)

As God loves the whole human family collectively, and as His provident and paternal love delights in each soul individually as if that soul alone constituted the whole of creation; so also do the true friends of God love. Their affection is so universal that it embraces all mankind, and so particular and even individ-

(8) Conceptions of Div. Love Chapter VI.

(9) Max. 158.

ual that it seems to be entirely devoted to every one who has the good fortune to meet them on the road of life.

6. Thus were the saints; they excluded nobody and loved everybody, but their love was not the same for all. They entertained a special affection for those who were dearer to God. However, their paternal and affectionate solicitude was greater towards those who needed it more. And indeed nobody is in greater moral indigence than he who lives far removed from God. Hence the triple characteristic of the saints which is more evident in the greater saints, in those whose mission in the world was higher and more visible. A genuine, sincere, and efficacious love for all; a sweet predilection for the best; an affectionate and paternal solicitude for the indigent. This is the character which sweetly draws us to our Divine Redeemer and which He communicates to His best friends. Consequently the character of our holy Father, that most tender lover of Jesus Christ and His cross must contain and portray in a marked degree this triple form of love. It is this character and no other which he wanted to stamp on all his children, notwithstanding the apparent harshness of his precaution, in which he tells us to consider all as strangers and to have the same forgetfulness towards all.

With this rigor, more ideal than real, the saint purports to make us love more and better,

and that our charity be more solicitous and efficacious. Here is a beautiful passage which illustrates and confirms all this doctrine. Speaking of the benefits of not rejoicing in natural goods, he says: *For besides disposing itself for the love of God and the other virtues, it makes a way for personal humility and universal charity towards our neighbors. When our affections, free from the influence of natural goods, which are deceitful, rest upon no one, the soul is free to love all men reasonably and spiritually, as God wills them to be loved. No one deserves to be loved except for his goodness, and when we love in this way, our love is pleasing unto God and in great liberty, and if there be attachment in it there is great attachment to God. For then the more this love grows, the more also grows our love for God, and the deeper our love for Him the more we shall love our neighbor: for the principle of both is the same.* (10) This is an auto-portrait of the saint, most austere in his doctrine and in all his life but most affectionate in his heart.

He well knew how poor is the human heart, how narrow and individualistic and even exclusive are its affections. He knew that the practice of virtue does not destroy, but rather enlivens, the natural sensitiveness of the heart. He was not ignorant of the fact that the religious,

(10) Ascent III. Chapt. 22.



whom as a skilful master he was now instructing in their duties of mutual intercourse, could later in their social relations and even in the exercise of their ministry, attach themselves to some hearts and entertain themselves with them to the detriment of the affection and solicitude they owed to other persons and to other affairs.

8. In foreseeing and trying to prevent these evils the saint showed that he understood thoroughly the poor human heart. He wishes that whenever we bestow our affection on any one we should disregard all those natural qualities in the persons which may seem to us worthy of affections. He requires of us that we pay attention to only one fact—the love God has for them. It is the only thing that renders a man truly and efficaciously lovable to a soul really purified from the vicious habits of sensuality and selfishness.

9. As this condition of loveliness is found in all men, for God loves all men, the affections which are well purified in their hearts will be universal; and if the motive of their love is general, their heart will enjoy great liberty, for it is not limited by any particular reason. But the love of God for men though so universal, admits of different degrees, for God loves some souls more than others; in the same manner the love of the saints for men excludes nobody, but is intensified on some persons in a most ineffable manner.

It is in this way that St. John of the Cross loved some persons, as his letters prove. The saint knew how difficult it is to do away with the affections founded on flesh and natural sympathy; how much it costs to soar to those heights from which one can look on men as God sees and loves them; therefore he gave us such a bitter medicine: *Consider all as strangers* for you must not attend to your own interests nor to their personal qualities to regulate your affection and your personal solicitude for them. For these reasons he bids us: *Do not love one person more than another, because you do not know who is more worthy of love and who is loved more by God, and since you can not know this, do not think at all about them, and avoid them as much as you possibly can.*

Behold here a remedy against the natural defects and weaknesses of the human heart, a remedy which characterizes the educational system of St. John of the Cross. All the masters of the spiritual life, those who limit themselves to the general practice of the Christian virtues and those who endeavor to lead souls to the highest perfection and union with God, very rightly think themselves obliged to regulate the affections of their disciples, for without previous education of the heart, both in the spiritual and in the moral order, time is lost most miserably.

10. Whoever does not control his heart will never become a saint nor a perfect man. He will

lose in one moment what it took years of labor to gain, simply because he never educated his emotions. We find in the world many persons with excellent qualities, but who are like little children. Some are ruined by an attachment, others are entangled in friendship, and many who otherwise have splendid gifts and personal qualities, yet disgrace themselves because they do not know how to overcome a multitude of little susceptibilities. To remedy these great human weaknesses the masters give a number of more or less complicated rules. Some of them wrote voluminous treatises to remedy the evil. St. John of the Cross, who in the "Ascent of Mount Carmel" made such a close and admirable analysis of the weaknesses of the human heart, wishes to show in a few lines how it can be cured radically, and therefore he goes straight to the root of the evil.

He forbids all disorderly movements of the heart, no matter how slightly they may diverge in the wrong direction or may cause remorse of conscience or the least delay in the way of perfection. Therefore he counsels us: *Do not interfere with anybody, do not think of anybody, nor love anybody, except looking at them from very high, from God Himself, and looking at them and loving them all as God looks at them and loves them.* And to this language so energetic he adds: *And if you do not keep this rule, you will never become a good religious. . . . And*

*if you indulge yourself in this, the devil in some way or other will delude you, or you will delude yourself, under the pretence of good or evil.* This threat, *you will never become a good religious if you fail in this,* should suffice for us who have the honor of being called children of the saint. He will not recognize as his own those who do not keep faithfully this advice or precaution. We know our holy Father does not wish to stifle or constrain in the least the human heart, but he does wish that all our affections be free not only from all vanity and impurity—a fact he supposes in his children—but also from all that can injure its beauty in the most pure eyes of God, or in any way limit its attention to certain persons or things to the detriment of other persons or affairs.

11. We have no right to complain that he is too exacting, for this is the teaching of our Fathers; this is the spirit of our Order; this is inherent to our vocation. For the more ordinary and easy virtues God has destined all Christians in general, but He will require more from us because He has given us much more. Our vocation is a gift that honors us much; and the graces God has attached to it and has granted us are without number. It is His infallible rule to exact much from him to whom much has been given. Therefore you, dear reader, whoever you may be, religious or priest, lay brother or sister, all of us who desire to walk in the way of perfection under the leadership of St. John of the



Cross, let us not persist in deceiving ourselves. The teaching of the saint is decisive and his threat is terrific: *If you dispense yourself in anything of this matter, you will never become a good religious.* And therefore I entreat you to make a careful examination of your conscience in regard to your affections and friendships to persons.

There is no doubt that any of your friendships is openly bad, that your heart entertains any affection which you esteem an offense to God. But notwithstanding the complete absence of a bad intention on your part, make this examination of conscience as if you were to render an account of your life to God. Consider well; do your affections cause some distractions and even anxiety in your spirit? Since you began to entertain that friendship, are you not less considerate with other persons? Are you not a little hard, and perhaps also a little unjust towards those who are not of your liking? Do they make you lose a great part of your time which you need to attend to other persons, to your studies, and to other occupations that have been entrusted to you? Do they prevent you from being present at the exercises of community as your rule obliges you? Does the attention to those persons render you less sincere with your Superiors and with yourself? Does it cause you to break any of your religious obligations, great or small? Are you becoming more sensitive toward all those who do not adapt them-

selves to your way of thinking on this particular point? Examine yourself well and perhaps you will find that those affections that seemed to you so innocent and just, do not bring you nearer to God, nor attach you more sweetly and strongly to the cloister, nor stimulate you to the better fulfilment of all your obligations. Perhaps you will be bound to acknowledge that nourishing these affections renders you lukewarm in the religious life, less submissive to the divine will, more sensitive toward those who correct you, less amiable to your brethren, and cause the thousand and one little observances of regular life to appear much heavier.

If your conscience can not answer favorably on all these points, then these friendships are not proper for you. But I do not tell you to break entirely with them, if there are just motives to continue your intercourse with them. I only tell you to be very prudent and to watch the movements of your heart. The same holy Father says: *Intercourse with people above what is necessary according to circumstances was never good for anybody however saintly he might be.* And mind that he says *above what was necessary according to circumstances.* And it is plain that reason and sometimes charity will require you to deal more with one person than another. Therefore what the saint wants of us is that we should regulate our affections and our intercourse with people by reason, by prudence, and even by charity, and not

by the inclinations and affections of our heart. Do so and this terrible precaution and threat of the saint will not condemn you.

12. But do not believe that you will keep faithfully the teaching of the saint if you have no affection for anybody; for you must have it, and the more lively the better, not only for God but also for all the children of God who are your neighbors, and especially those whom Divine Providence has placed near you, that you may help them or they may help you or give you occasion to merit. Coldness of heart towards our neighbor never was or ever can be a sign of great Christian virtue and still less of religious perfection. Indifference or coldness of heart is either a sign of hardness of heart or is leading to it, and this is not the daughter of charity but of pride and selfishness. Take counsel, dear reader, and always bear in mind that it is not so difficult to regulate according to God's will the affectionate feelings of our heart, so as to keep them always alive through the many vicissitudes and contradictions we shall necessarily experience in our intercourse with the neighbor.

It is true there is danger that the heart on account of its affectionate feelings, may deviate from the rules of prudence and charity, but there is still greater danger that it may be left without affection and die of coldness. One of the greatest evils that St. Paul noticed in human nature degraded by the old paganism was the want of

affection among men. *Foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy.* (11) God is charity and they who approach nearer to Him by holiness of life, share with Him more of the sweetness of His infinite charity. The person who has a heart naturally rich in affections has received a great treasure. To become a saint he needs only to know how to regulate his heart.

13. To attach ourselves to certain persons and to allow ourselves to be carried away by such attachments, only because they naturally please us, is the sign of a weak character, of a childish mind. To know how to subject this affection to reason and prudence is proper to wise and serious men. It suffices to be proud not to love anybody, but to love all it is necessary to be very good. To incline towards those only who adapt themselves to our tastes and pleasures, and to show ourselves kind and affectionate towards them alone, one needs but to be conceited and selfish and to regard all things from the vantage point of comfort and convenience. But to be always affable, kind, and full of affection to all about us, whatever may be their personal qualities, their character, and their social condition, this requires great effort, continuous sacrifice of little susceptibilities and lively inclinations, which is impossible without great virtue and abundant grace of God.

(11) Romans I. 31.



You must not think therefore that the ideal of Christian virtue consists in putting your heart in an ice box that it may become insensible to all things, love nobody, and forget everybody. This ideal consists rather in efficaciously defending your heart not only against all that could mislead it in the manifestation of its affections, but also against all that could in any way deprive it of its life and vigor. Perpetual youthfulness of heart, notwithstanding the cares and trials of human life, is characteristic of the saints. Believe me, perfect Christian virtue and great religious perfection consist not in forgetfulness and disaffection, but in forgetting and disliking yourself. It consists in perfect self-forgetfulness, in loving extremely your neighbor and in sacrificing yourself, always lavishing favors and tender affection on others and expecting no return but from God.

This purifies the heart more effectively, and pleases God and gains more glory than the most severe penances and the noisy execution of great actions. Do not think this is not the genuine doctrine of our Father St. John of the Cross. It is he who says: *The clean of heart are called by our Divine Saviour blessed, for blessedness is given to nothing less than true love.* (12) Remember that we are children of that remarkable woman, who as a woman and a saint, said so well: *Happy the loving heart which has placed*

(12) Max. 161.

*its thoughts on God alone, and of a saint who likewise says: The greatest glory we can give to God consists in serving Him according to evangelical perfection; and nothing else has value or usefulness for man. (13) And therefore the end to which all the teachings of our holy Father are directed, and the fruit he wishes his children to derive from them is to stimulate their hearts to the exact fulfilment of the divine precept which contains all the evangelical doctrine, and which our Lord called new because the world had not known it: A new commandment I give unto you; that you love one another, as I have loved you. (14)*

Christ our Lord left it as the distinctive mark of His followers: *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another. (15)* With these words He gives us to understand that this commandment well understood and practised, is of itself sufficient, and without this all the rest avails nothing. Thus St. Paul understood and taught saying: *Owe no man anything, but love one another. For he that loveth his neighbor, hath fulfilled the law....The love of our neighbor worketh no evil. Love therefore is the fulfilment of the law. (16)* And for the same reason let us establish it firmly, that our holy Father in this precaution as well as in all his

(13) Max. 242.

(14) John XIII. 34.

(15) John XIII. 35.

(16) Rom. XIII. 10.

writings, no matter what the literal sense may appear to be, does not wish to restrain the heart of his children and disciples, neither in the love of God nor in the love of men. What the saint intends, as he declares in another of his books, is that we should not be like children in our manner of wishing and feeling, and in the exhibition of our affections and sentiments. His final aim is to make us men of a heart so robust, so holy and sane, so forgetful of itself and so full of love for God and men, that we may be able to love as Jesus loves.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SECOND PRECAUTION AGAINST THE WORLD WORLDLY RICHES

1. WORDS OF THE SAINT.—2. RICHES OF THE WORLD FORM THE SECOND DANGER TO VIRTUE.—3. NATURAL AND LAWFUL TO HAVE CERTAIN AFFECTIONS.—4. HOW MAN HAS DISTORTED THE DESIRE FOR POSSESSIONS.—5. EXHAUSTLESS FOUNTAIN OF DISORDERS.—6. THREATS AND EULOGIES.—7. DIVINE PROMISES TO THE POOR OF SPIRIT.—8. NEITHER RICHES NOR MISERY.—9. VOW OF POVERTY. DEFINITION OF ST. THOMAS.—10. HOW EASILY THE HEART IS ATTACHED TO WORLDLY THINGS, NO MATTER WHETHER GREAT OR SMALL.—11. DOWNFALL OF MANY SOULS.—12. FOUNTAIN OF PEACE.

1. *“The second precaution against the world relates to temporal goods. If you earnestly desire to escape the evils which worldly goods occasion and restrain your excessive desire, you must hold all personal possession in abhorrence. You must not be solicitous about what you eat or drink or wear, or about any created thing whatever; you must not be solicitous for tomorrow, but occupy yourself with higher things, with the kingdom of God, for all these things, as our Lord says, shall be added unto you. He who takes care of the beasts will not forget you. If you do this, you will attain unto silence and have peace in your senses.”*



2. The main object of the religious life is to free us from all the impediments which can hinder us from the attainment of perfect charity, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches. The end then of the religious life, as well as of Christian morality, is to purify the heart from all those things that can prevent it from loving, as God wishes it to love. Not only our neighbor, but also the riches of this world, can weaken and pervert the movements of our heart. Therefore our holy Father, after having instructed us in his first precaution in regard to the love we owe our fellow-men, teaches us in this how to regulate our affections for the riches of the earth. Here too he shows himself very energetic and seemingly very rigorous. *If you earnestly desire, he tells us, to escape the evils which worldly goods occasion and restrain your excessive desires, you must hold all personal possessions in abhorrence.* (1) The saint gives us the reason for this abhorrence in one of his admirable thoughts, when he says: *The infinite riches of God can be contained only in an empty and solitary heart.* (2) It is necessary to understand this doctrine, that being well understood, it may be better esteemed and more easily practised.

3. A certain affection for the things of the earth is not bad insofar as it is the natural means for obtaining just and reasonable ends. Hence the affection which is natural to us can not be

(1) Max. 2.

(2) Max. 353.

culpable. God Himself after He created man, showed him the beauties and treasures of the earth and constituted him lord of the world: *And God blessed them saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth.* (3) Thus God spoke to our first parents. He appointed them kings and lords, and we, their children, though so impoverished by sin, have inherited the right to exercise this dominion over all creation. The eagerness for possession is therefore natural to the human heart, and for the same reason the word *mine* has a fascinating charm, it always sounds sweet to our ear. Children when showing us their toys pronounce it with innocent pride. Kings and merchants, when referring to their palaces, their industries, and their estates, repeat it with haughty arrogance.

If this word awakens such a sweet echo in the human soul, it is because it corresponds to a natural inspiration of the human spirit. Consequently it should not be condemned without examination, not even in the name of mysticism, for one truth can never be at variance with another, except when we fail to understand both or either of them. God has not created the human heart with a limitless capacity that He might have the pleasure of seeing it always longing for something, nor has He made such beautiful creatures

(3) Gen. I. 28.

that we should hate them, nor finally has He given us the power to possess and dominate them for the sole purpose that we should entirely free ourselves from them. What God wants of us is the perfect education of the affections and desires for the goods of earth.

If our holy Father so strongly recommends detachment, it is because he wishes us to possess all things in God. For this reason he takes pleasure in repeating the same word *mine* in this beautiful passage: *Thou wilt not take away from me, O my God, what Thou hast once given me in Thy only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in Whom Thou hast given me all I desire....The heavens are mine, the earth is mine; mine are the just, and the sinners are mine; mine are the angels and the Mother of God; all creatures are mine, God Himself is mine and for me; because Christ is mine and all for me. What then dost thou ask and what dost thou seek, my soul? Thine is all this and all is for thee; do not take less nor rest with crumbs that fall from the table of thy Father. Go forth and exult in thy glory, hide thyself in it and rejoice, and thou shalt obtain the desires of thy heart. (4)*

This inclination to possess and to dominate over all the earthly goods God so lavishly bestows on us, so far from being bad in itself, corresponds to the command given by God to our



first parents: *Fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over it.* Behold the language of God to man, and the word of God never vanishes in air. Before pronouncing it, God prepared in man's heart the necessary dispositions to receive it, and left there for its execution, desires as ardent and imperishable as human nature itself.

4. Though man can not radically destroy anything that is natural to himself without at the same time destroying himself, he can however weaken and profane everything. He can cause the most noble aspirations of his spirit to deviate from their proper object. Man has done this to his natural aspirations for possession, unfortunately converting them into a most prolific source of disorders, that have in turn engendered countless evils for the whole human race. Through an excessive love for the good things given him by God, man has often been guilty of enormous injustice against his brother by depriving him of his right to a proportionate share of the same goods; he has shown himself ungrateful to God by giving to creatures the love which was due to the Creator alone. Instead of using these gifts for the service of God and his neighbor, his pride converted them into a pedestal from whence he thinks he can with impunity insult God and despise and oppress his brother.

Since every natural aspiration of the human spirit is imperishable, because it flows immediately from human nature and mediately from God Himself, the Author of this nature, we must



not then pretend to destroy it, but we must educate it and watch over it, and this with still greater care when the same inclinations are innate to us; for if human malice should ever vitiate such inclinations, that vitiation would be most thorough and disastrous in its effects.

5. This is what takes place when the love for temporal goods becomes sullied. The desire for possessions which in itself is good, honest, and holy, was placed by God in our soul, but man converts it into an inexhaustible source of evils and calamities. Therefore theologians reckon covetousness among the capital sins, because it is the most prolific mother of innumerable disorders, of great crimes as well as of countless smaller faults, discernible only to souls well purified by the frequent contemplation of God. The poor maid who in her daily marketing discounts but a few cents; the merchant who deceives his client; the usurer who pitilessly ruins his unfortunate victim; the potentate who reduces to misery a multitude of small fortunes to add some millions to his own; the timid nun who conceals a little picture that her superior may not dispose of it; the minister of the Lord who scandalizes his people by the manner in which he exacts the obolus that all owe to the altar; the religious who in the management of these things breaks one of the fundamental vows of religious life; all, each in his own way, is guilty of covetousness. Were it not for the inordinate desire of possessing, great crimes would

be avoided in the word, while many scandals in the sanctuary, and a multiplicity of disturbances in religious life would never take place.

Our Divine Redeemer came to remedy this dangerous cancer of the human heart, and though He did not entirely root it out from humanity, He cured it in very many souls and lessened its effects in society. The Savior, therefore, to the great surprise of those who did not understand His spirit, showed Himself enamored of poverty of spirit, and extolled it by His example and His doctrine. He was born poor, He lived in poverty, He was always surrounded by the poor, and finally He died in the greatest indigence.

6. As if His own example were not enough, Jesus consecrated a great part of His preaching to eulogizing poverty and severely threatened its enemies, in fact He was unsparing in His denunciation of those who love riches inordinately. With an indignation never before seen in Him, He drove from the temple those who were seeking worldly profit in the house of God and pronounced this terrible imprecation: *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.* (5) *I say to you: It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.* (6) On the other hand our Lord commenced His sermon on the mount with that sublime hymn of praise of the

(5) Luk. XVII. 24.

(6) Mat. XIX. 24.

poor and humble: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the clean of heart.* (7) He identified His person with the poor, promising the same reward for a service rendered the poor, as if it had been done to Himself. (8)

To remove from the hearts of men all superfluous affection for the things of the world, He addressed these familiar and charming discourses to His disciples, a few poor men whom the Son of God destined to reform the world: *Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say to you that not even Solomon in his glory was arrayed as one of these. And if the grass of the field, which is today and tomorrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe: How much more you, O ye of little faith? For your Father knoweth that you have need of these things, seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.* (9)

7. And as if this were still too little to detach the poor human heart, He enriched His teaching with magnificent promises for those who would

(7) Mat. V. 3-4-8.

(8) Mat. XXV. 40.

(9) Mat. VI. 26 etc.

for His sake renounce earthly goods. He promised a hundred fold in this world for whatever they left and in the next life everlasting, besides making them His assessors at the last day when He will come to judge the world. (10) It is no wonder therefore that in the face of these threats and promises, and with their eyes fixed on Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, so great a multitude of souls have generously condemned all earthly goods. And we who have imposed on ourselves the obligation of tending towards religious perfection, have likewise solemnly promised to abandon riches the better to imitate Christ, for the vow of poverty is one of the essential conditions of the religious life. This is so true that it is impossible for a religious order to prosper without its members possessing the spirit of poverty.

8. But as the religious orders are not composed of angels, but of men, and as men have a multitude of necessities relating to food, clothing, lodging, etc., and as we must not ask Divine Providence to provide us miraculously with all these things, therefore religious orders are not forbidden to hold possessions, nor are their members according to their talents prohibited to take care of such goods, provided it is without detriment to their spirit and to the principal end of their vocation. God blesses holy poverty, but not misery. Riches are a danger to virtue, but it is very difficult to

(10) Mat. XIX. 28.



preserve peace in a house where even the necessary is wanting. The most important, the requisite for the virtue of poverty, according to the spirit of our Father St. John of the Cross, is not to be in want of all things, but the goods of the house should be administered in such a way that neither the spirit of the community will suffer, nor the members be in the least prevented from attaining their principal end, which is the kingdom of God, nor the heart of any religious be inordinately attached to these goods.

9. For this end we have the vow and the virtue of holy poverty; the vow which is a *denial*, and the virtue which is an *assertion*. The vow teaches us what we must avoid in the line of material riches so as not to destroy the religious life, and the virtue directs us how to use earthly goods according to the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Religious persons do not frequently break the vow of poverty, at least in any grave matter, though it would not be useless to review now and then not only our conscience, but also moral theology; for to sin even gravely against the vow of poverty, is much easier than is generally believed, and the evil inclination to appropriate goods blinds the conscience.

The intention of our holy Father in this precaution is certainly not to prevent transgressions against the vow of poverty; in this he supposes his children sufficiently advised. He wants to instruct us in the practice of the virtue of poverty

for which the vow is intended. The vow is only the means, the virtue is the end; and as the means are useless when they do not direct to the end, the vow becomes useless when it does not help us to acquire the virtue of poverty, that true poverty of spirit which Jesus Christ taught, and the saints so highly recommended. St. Thomas of Aquinas, following St. Augustine and St. Jerome, says that "*poverty of spirit is a renunciation of temporal things done in spirit by the instinct or motion of the Holy Ghost; an annihilation of the spirit of pride.*" (11) Therefore, if poverty is of the spirit, it can not exist in a purse, nor in an iron safe, in clothes, nor in a cell, but in our soul.

Since it originates by a special motion of the Holy Ghost, it is a supernatural virtue, and has for its proper effect, to cure conceit and pride of mind caused by the disorderly affection to riches. It is clear that one can manage and even legally possess temporal goods, without his heart being inordinately attached to them. St. Ferdinand, St. Louis, and David were not really poor, but notwithstanding their riches they were poor in spirit, otherwise they would not have been saints. David says in his canticles and prayers to God: *I am poor, and in labors from my youth.* (12)

The vow of poverty which disqualifies a religious from legally possessing anything in his own name, is an excellent and efficacious means for

(11) St. Thomas II. 11, Q. XIX. a. 12.

(12) Ps. 87-16.

obtaining poverty of spirit. But it may be that one has never broken the vow of poverty and is really poor, even needy, and yet is not poor in spirit, if in his heart he fosters any disorderly affection for temporal goods. This also is the doctrine of our Father, and it could not be otherwise, for this is the only true doctrine. There is no question here of the lack of things, because that does not divest the soul of its affection for them if it has any, but of the absence of any desire or longing for them, which leaves the soul free and detached, for material objects can not satisfy the soul: *I am speaking here of the absence of things—for absence is not detachment if the desire remains—but of that detachment which consists in suppressing desire and avoiding pleasure; it is this that sets the soul free, even though possession may still be retained. It is not the things of this world that occupy or injure the soul, for they do not enter within, but rather the wish for, and desire of them which abide within it.* (13)

10. But the saint, as an experienced master, recommends extreme vigilance in this matter; and with much reason for we can easily deceive ourselves. With the natural and just desire of having at our disposal the things we need for noble and holy ends, pride and selfishness can easily mix themselves; and unfortunately they

interfere too frequently in the most holy enterprises. In the management of temporal goods, selfishness can mingle in a manner so subtle that it is most difficult to recognize it. Only by humble prayer and frequent and careful examination of conscience can we know what spirit is moving us. Thus it can be known if loftiness and pride have disappeared from our soul, whose destruction is the proper effect of poverty of spirit, by the diligence and solicitude with which we take care of the things of the order according to our condition and rank; by the peace and resignation with which we allow ourselves to be deprived of anything, even of personal things; by the peace and spiritual joy with which we accept the thousand little privations and contradictions that we encounter in the monastic life.

It would be a disgrace if after many years of a life of poverty we were still far from the spirit of the poverty of Jesus Christ. Our Divine Redeemer wished when founding the religious life, that religious as the real followers of His spirit of poverty should be a constant reprehension to that covetousness which was fearfully and deeply rooted in humanity. It would therefore be a derision of the Gospel and a scandal to the world if the same attachment was found in religious that is found in seculars. What does it matter whether the things to which the religious is inordinately attached are of little value of themselves, if they lose that purity and liberty of spirit



which the Lord seeks in His beloved poor? Therefore our Father St. John of the Cross says: *The bird is equally prevented from flying whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds it fast, for until the cord is broken the bird can not fly: so the soul held in the bonds of human affections, however slight they may be, can not while they last make its way to God.* (14)

11. Forgetfulness of this teaching has brought great ruin to many souls. They believe that because their conscience does not accuse them of mortal sin against the vow of poverty, they fulfill their duty towards God and that they have a right to be counted by Jesus Christ among the poor, so dear to His divine Heart. This is however a very great mistake; for if they do not try to detach themselves from their excessive affection to a book, a habit, a room, a convent, a place, they are not poor in spirit, and instead of attracting divine blessings, they will provoke God's wrath against themselves and against the community. Therefore our holy Father adds: *God is justly angry with certain souls whom He by His mighty arm has delivered from the world and from the occasions of grievous sins, but who are weak and careless in mortifying certain imperfections; and therefore He permits them to fall through their desires from bad to worse.* (15) Our holy Father

(14) Max. 20.

(15) Max. 215.

says again that we must abhor all manner of possession which is not in accordance with the liberty and detachment explained above. It is very certain that no community will suffer any privation of necessities if every member practises true poverty of spirit. For as the saint says: *He who has care of the beasts will not forget you. God has promised this; but He exacts fidelity on our part.*

A single restless and immortified soul injures a community more than many wicked demons. Only one among many faithful was guilty of breaking the law of God, and notwithstanding God turned away His eyes and His protection from all the people until the culprit was separated and punished (16) The presence of the covetous Apostle Judas on the night of the Last Supper restrained Jesus. When Judas left the room Jesus was among His friends, and held those ineffable discourses related by St. John. A single restless soul in a community disturbs the peace of all and prevents Jesus from being among His true friends.

12. The exact observance of this precaution in a religious house will prove a perennial fountain of peace for souls and a perpetual source of spiritual and material blessings. Let us finish this chapter with another quotation from our holy Father: *And strive to preserve the spirit of pov-*

(16) Josue VII-12.

*erty and contempt of all earthly things; otherwise be assured that you will fall into a thousand spiritual and temporal necessities. But if you are content with God alone you will neither have nor feel any wants; because the poor in spirit is more content and cheerful when in need, because he has made nothingness his all; having found therein all things, he finds liberty of heart; blessed nothingness and blessed hiddenness of heart which is of such surpassing virtue that it subjects all things to the soul, not being subject to anything itself. (17)*

(17) Let. 15.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE THIRD PRECAUTION AGAINST THE WORLD NOT TO INTERFERE IN OTHER MEN'S AFFAIRS

1. WORDS OF THE SAINT.—2. BAD EXAMPLE IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. THE SAINTS WERE PRACTICAL AND SINCERE.—3. ORDINARY CAUSES OF SCANDAL.—4. REAL FAULTS IN RELIGIOUS HOUSES.—5. THE DEVIL TEMPTS SAINTS. PRAYER OF JESUS FOR SOULS THAT ARE TEMPTED. ST. PETER, JOB FRIENDS OF JESUS.—6. DIVINE PROVIDENCE WANTS US TO PROFIT BY OUR FAILINGS.—7. GREAT SOULS ARE NOT SCANDALIZED. HUMAN WEAKNESSES HARM MORE THE INCAUTIOUS WHO OBSERVE THEM THAN THE WEAK PERSONS THEMSELVES.—8. SALUTARY ADVICE AND ENERGETIC LANGUAGE OF OUR HOLY FATHER.—9. AN OBSERVATION. RELIGIOUS VOCATION A GIFT OF GOD; IT DOES NOT MAKE US IMPECCABLE.—10. GREAT ADVANTAGES OF RELIGIOUS VOCATION. VIEW IT FROM THE LAST MOMENT OF LIFE.

1. *The third precaution is most necessary, that you may avoid all evil in your relations with the other religious of the community. Many from not heeding this, not only have lost their peace of mind, but have fallen and fall daily into many disorders and sins. Be especially careful never to let your mind dwell on, and still less your tongue to speak of any religious in particular, do not discuss his condition, his conversation, or his actions however grave, either under color of zeal, or of remedying what seems amiss, except only to him who of right should be spoken to, and then*



*at the proper time. Never be scandalized or surprised at what you see or hear, and keep your soul in complete forgetfulness of all.*

*If you lived among the angels and gave heed to what was going on, many things would seem to you to be wrong because you do not understand them. Therefore take warning of Lot's wife who, because she was disturbed at the destruction of Sodom, and turned back to see what happened, God punished her for this, and she was turned into a pillar of salt. This teaches you that it is the will of God even if you were living among devils, you should so live as not to turn back in thought to consider what they are doing, but forget them entirely. Try to keep your soul wholly for God, and do not suffer the thought of this or that to disturb you. Be sure of this, that there is no lack of stumbling blocks in religious houses; because there is no lack of devils who labor to ruin the saints. God permits this to exercise and prove them, and if you are not on your guard, you will never become a true religious, do what you may, neither will you attain to holy detachment and recollection, nor avoid loss. If you live otherwise, notwithstanding your zeal and good intentions, the devil will lay hold of you in one way or another, and indeed you are already sufficiently in his power when your soul is allowed such distractions as these. Remember what St. James, the Apostle says: "If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, this man's*

*religion is vain."* This is understood no less of the interior than of the exterior tongue.

2. Real or supposed bad example of our brethren in religion is the third obstacle which the world opposes to the virtue of a religious person. We have seen that the first obstacle is irregular affection for any person; the second is disorderly attachment to worldly goods; the third is the bad example which perhaps we imagine we see in those who profess to follow the same rule as ourselves and in whose company we live. It was to guard us against this danger that our holy Father St. John of the Cross wrote this third precaution. It is evident that our holy Father considered this obstacle of bad example far more dangerous than the two former ones, for this precaution is more extensive, and is framed in stronger language. Moreover, in the first of those famous "Four Counsels to a Religious," the saint treats of the same subject, and almost in the same words, which proves that this was his prevailing thought. As he well knew the disastrous effects of bad example in the religious life, he wished his children to be thoroughly advised and prepared to meet it. Therefore he uses such energetic and truthful language which reveals a spirit full of solicitude and prudence. Here is another evidence that the true mystic is eminently practical, notwithstanding that he ordinarily dwells on the heights of pure idealism. Our holy Father lived habitually united to God; but this did not

prevent him from observing the persons and things entrusted to him. This precaution shows that he was a most perfect master and understood human life even in its least details; for he points out defects and dangers with such a wonderful precision that to excessively timid and less sincere persons his language must appear discouraging.

If this precaution, as stated above, had not been written by a saint like St. John of the Cross, undoubtedly some people would consider it less charitable, and perhaps even offensive to religious orders. But so are the saints. Before all, they are friends of truth and therefore sincere. They do not believe that true virtue needs to hide anything and thus they are true realists. They see persons and things as they really are; and as they see things they say them, and they accept persons as they are, to instruct them and esteem them. The saint therefore goes straight to the point and lays down this proposition, which perhaps sounds bad in the ears of those unaccustomed to bear the whole truth and who know virtue only by halves: *Be sure of this, that there is no lack of stumbling blocks in religious houses, because there is no lack of devils who labor to ruin the saints.*

3. What he wants to say is that whoever is not very careful, will always find in the religious life of his brethren something which will scandalize him. And the cause or motive of such



scandal, as it happens in the world, may be of two kinds. It is necessary to distinguish them well not to fall victims to our own error. Sometimes the motive or cause of the scandal is only in the person who is scandalized. Or it may be found in his ignorance; because he does not know the other's reasons for acting in that manner; or again, the cause may be in his own vicious sentiments, his heart inclines to interpret amiss the actions of his neighbor. Ninety-nine per cent of the scandals in religious houses have their true origin in one of these two causes or in both together: ignorance, or want of rectitude in the persons who are scandalized.

When the spirit is not well purified through a profound knowledge of its own weaknesses, nor the heart well filled with charity and noble sentiments, one sees always some stain in other people's reputation. Then too in moral matters the colors are more subjective. Persons appear to us not so much what they really are, but rather what we ourselves are. There is no virtue so pure that will not seem stained to infirm souls. Therefore our Father St. John of the Cross says: *If you lived among the angels and gave heed to what was going on, many things would seem to you to be wrong, because you do not understand them.*

4. At other times the motive of the scandal is exterior, as when we see that others really fail in their duty. This scandal also can exist and, in fact, does exist in the cloister; for sometimes we



see our brethren as well as ourselves perform actions which are not indifferent in matters of morality; we are not angels, but men. We have not yet reached to that happy mansion of peace for which we hope; we are still walking through muddy, thorny, and dangerous roads; therefore we shall sometimes see our brother's garments soiled and rent; perhaps we shall even behold him bleeding with wounds, and we may witness some one falling most pitifully. Indeed, no one can be completely secure against all these dangers whilst living on this earth. Behold then why the saint in this precaution advises us so paternally and in words full of charity and prudence: *Never be scandalized or surprised at what you see or hear . . . because there is no lack of devils who labor to ruin the saints; God permits this to exercise and prove them.*

5. Besides the numerous weaknesses inherent to impoverished human nature, of which we find it so hard to purify ourselves, are the frequent instigations of the evil spirit. The Holy Ghost continually admonishes us to be on our guard against these instigations of Satan. *Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.* (1) And our Lord warns us that Satan robs the seeds of good thoughts deposited in the soul by the word of God. (2) Jesus Christ in-

(1) Peter V. 8.

(2) Luke VIII. 12.

formed St. Peter that the devil wanted to have the Apostles at his disposition to winnow them as the farmer winnows the wheat in the sieve: *Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren.* (3)

It is to be remarked that in view of the temptations that the Apostles and all the faithful have to suffer, Jesus prayed for them; in His infallible prayer, He did not ask that the devil might not tempt His disciples, nor that he might do them no harm. He asked only that the chief of the Apostles and consequently his successors should never waver in the faith. But the first Apostle was tempted, and fell shamefully denying his Master.

This temptation and fall were according to the designs of Providence which permitted this fall of Peter, that Peter, being once converted and instructed by his sad experience, might fulfill the commandment of his Master: *And thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren.* (4) We see the same in the history of Job when God said to Satan: *Behold he is in thy hand, but yet save his life.* (5) That is, do with him whatsoever you like, mortify him at your pleasure provided you spare his life. This is also the condition that

(3) Luke XXII. 31, 32.

(4) Luke XXII. 32.

(5) Job II. 6.

God lays on the devil when He permits the wicked one to tempt us. He does not allow the assaults of the enemy to be heavier than we can bear with His grace and our personal efforts: *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able* (6) says St. Paul. Our Lord Jesus Christ in His sublime and tender farewell sermon to His disciples—which should be read on bended knees daily by priests and religious—prayed for the Apostles and for all those who would through their word believe in Him. And therefore He prayed for each one of us who were all present to His mind and heart. *I kept them in Thy name*, said the loving Master, *those whom thou gavest me have I kept. . . . They are not of the world, as I also am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but Thou shouldst keep them from evil.* (7) Our divine Redeemer wants even His best friends to pass through this world, through this valley of tears so filled with dangers. And why? Only to be tempted and tried? While we live in this world, wherever we turn our eyes we shall find dangers and shall see imperfections and faults, we ourselves shall not be free from them; we may perhaps even witness some sad defections.

6. Divine Providence permits these faults, both great and small, very often for the good of

(6) I. Cor. XX. 13.

(7) Jn. XVII. 12, 14, 15.

the person who commits them. Thus David although he bitterly repented his fall, said to the Lord: *It is good for me that thou hast humbled me, that I may learn thy justifications.* (8) And in Ecclesiasticus we read: *What doth he know that hath not been tried? A man that hath much experience shall think of many things.* (9) At other times they are permitted as a warning to render us vigilant and more prudent, that seeing our brother's fall, we may take greater precaution to avoid the same or greater faults. Therefore the Apostle warns us: *He that thinketh himself to stand let him take heed lest he fall.* (10)

7. Let him then who is easily scandalized at the faults of his neighbor, and consequently esteems him less, remember that in this he shows his utter ignorance of the laws of Divine Providence for the sanctification of souls and how little he knows of the great weakness of the human heart. Such scandal nearly always indicates a real want of uprightness in those who are so easily scandalized. It is nothing more than a pretence for criticising his neighbor and for concealing his own want of esteem and affection. Great souls are never scandalized at anything; no faults will cause them to cease loving and esteeming their neighbor. Faults, especially those among religious persons, do more harm to the

(8) Ps. 118, 71.

(9) Eccl. XXXIV. 9.

(10) I. Cor. XII. 12.



observer than to the person who commits them. Therefore the Holy Ghost warns us in this notable passage: *Lie not in wait, nor seek after wickedness in the house of the just, nor spoil his rest; for a just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again.* (11) It is as if he said: "Because you have seen the fall of your brother who is, as you know, otherwise just and good, you must not make his fault appear greater than it is; do not be guileful or perverse, either seeking or aggravating faults which do not exist except in your own imagination and malice. Do not destroy his goods, that is, his reputation, for he shall fall and shall fall seven times, and so many times he shall rise again; while you who observe and criticize him shall persevere in your sin of uncharitableness.

8. To avoid all these evils St. John of the Cross advises and even commands us, to remove our thoughts from all that is not edifying in our neighbor. He wants us to live in the community as if we were entirely alone in the world: *Be especially careful, he says, never to let your mind dwell on, still less your tongue speak of what is going on in the community, of its past or present state. Do not speak of any religious in particular; do not discuss his condition, his conversation, or his affairs.* And so strong is the language of our holy Father that, as he said be-

(11) Prov. XXIV, 15, 16.

fore, without thus refraining ourselves from what does not concern us, we could not enjoy peace even if we lived among the angels; now he adds: *This teaches you that God wants you to live in such a way that even if you were living among devils, you should not pay any attention to their actions, but completely disregard them, trying to keep your soul pure and entire for God.* Greater emphasis could not be given to these words; therefore the doctrine recommended in such strong language must be of the greatest importance.

9. But before commenting further upon it, I wish to meet an objection which might be brought forward: "If in the religious life one has to see bad example; if a St. John of the Cross thought he ought to warn us not to be scandalized at anything; if one may fall; if even the cloister is not a sufficient safeguard for virtue: then my vocation is not of such great importance. I could have remained in the world and tried to sanctify myself there as well as in the cloister." These arguments are superficial and therefore prove nothing. First of all we must remember that vocation is not the effect of each one's fancy. *You have not chosen me; but I have chosen you*, said the Divine Redeemer to His disciples, and He repeats it daily to each religious person. *I have chosen you that you should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain.* (12) Vocation is a very

(12) John XV. 15, 16.

great gift to which are attached the graces each one needs for his own personal sanctification; he who does not follow it will be saved but with difficulty. And therefore it is as great nonsense to think that he who has been called to the religious state might as well remain in the world, as it would be to insist that one who has never been called to this state should become a religious. Religious vocation does not render either us or our neighbor impeccable; for this is not the design of Divine Providence, but it causes us to fall less frequently and to rise more easily than people living in the world.

10. When molested with temptations against our religious vocation, it will be good to meditate attentively on each of the nine advantages that St. Bernard says are attached to the religious vocation. *In this holy state a man lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more speedily, walks more cautiously, is refreshed more frequently with heavenly comforts, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is purified more quickly, and rewarded more abundantly.* (13) Consequently a sincere person will never diminish his appreciation for the religious state even though he may notice some imperfections or even bad example. There may be, and in fact there are temptations in this state of life, but it is nowhere easier to overcome them, it is nowhere so diffi-

(13) St. Bernard de Bono Rel.

cult to fall and at the same time so easy to rise. At the hour of death nobody feels sorry for having lived in a religious order, but on the contrary, almost all the persons of the world desire at that hour that they had lived in the most austere order. Let us not cherish anything during life that we know will torment us at the last hour. I do not wish to love even for a single moment what I can not recall to mind without feeling remorse of conscience. Let us therefore cast from us any temptations against our religious vocation, and let us rather study well this precaution of St. John of the Cross. He assures us that without putting this advice into practice we endanger the fruits of our religious vocation, whereas by keeping it carefully we free ourselves from the greatest enemy of our soul.

But this requires a separate chapter.



## CHAPTER VII

### RASH JUDGMENT AND GOSSIPING

1. SEVERE BUT FATHERLY ADMONITION.—2. INTERIOR MURMURS. IGNORING THE INTENTIONS OF OUR NEIGHBOR.—3. SICKLY SOULS. NOTABLE OBSERVATION OF ST. THOMAS: HE WHO EASILY JUDGES REVEALS THE BOTTOM OF HIS OWN SOUL.—4. TERRIBLE THREATS AGAINST EVIL THINKERS; ST. PAUL, ST. THOMAS. THE HOLY GOSPELS. GOD IS MORE BENIGN THAN WE IN JUDGING OUR NEIGHBOR.—5. EXCUSES THAT ARE NOT VERY SAFE.—6. SINS OF THE TONGUE PROCEED FROM AUTO-INTOXICATION.—7. DAMAGES OF AN IMPRUDENT WORD.—8. EFFECTS OF BACKBITING. HOLY SCRIPTURE CONDEMNS BACK BITERS.—9. SINS OF THE TONGUE ARE THE ENEMIES OF CHARITY AND PEACE.—10. BACKBITERS AND THE PILER OF SALT. MOUNTAIN OF CARDONA.—11. SOULS THAT TURN EVERYTHING ABOUT THEM BARREN.—12. RELIGIOUS HOUSES ACCORDING TO THE DESIGNS OF GOD. A GREAT DANGER.—13. OPPORTUNE OBSERVATION. A PRUDENT SUPERIOR.—14. FORETASTE OF HEAVEN. WORDS OF ST. TERESA OF JESUS.

1. Our holy Father says that for not bearing his third precaution in mind “*many have lost, not only the peace and good of their soul, but have fallen and do fall into many evils and sins.*” And in the first of his *Four Maxims to a Religious* in which he recommends exactly the same doctrine, he bids us: *Observe this well. It is so important that for not keeping it, many religious not only*

*did not profit by their other virtuous and religious actions, but they continually went backwards, falling from bad to worse.* These words of our holy Father are too serious for any one among his children not to give them the greatest attention. It is assured here that for not paying proper attention to this fatherly advice, many religious have lost the merit of all their virtuous actions and placed themselves in a very dangerous position, where they went from bad to worse and finally fell into many faults and sins. It is very sad to think that after many years of religious life, some of us perhaps have lost not only those years of a life of privation and suffering, but have brought ourselves to a most dangerous state and have become involved in innumerable faults and sins. Our holy Father assures us that there are many who have actually placed themselves in this perilous condition.

2. Let us note some of the many evils to which forgetfulness of this maxim may lead. Proceeding in logical order, the first evil the observer and caviler of other men's actions incurs is the *tendency to judge his brethren unfavorably*, which Theology calls making rash judgments. In the language of our holy Father it is termed interior or mental criticism or murmuring. When explaining in this same precaution a celebrated passage of Holy Scripture, of whom we shall speak later, he says: *Which is understood no less of the interior than of the exterior tongue.* This first evil will

necessarily befall those who are addicted to observing and criticising their neighbor.

There are as many different ways of understanding as there are heads and hearts. In every order, whether religious, civil or moral, there are certain principles or truths which we might call dogmatic truths, because in general at least we all agree to them. But in secondary principles or truths, and especially in detailed appreciation of certain actions, each one sees them according to his own personal disposition. Moreover, in the actions of our neighbor we see only the exterior, whereas we are nearly always ignorant of what we should know before we are able to judge aright, namely of that which really makes the person worthy of praise or blame, that is the intention and motives which impelled him to act. Since we are then nearly always ignorant of the true moral principle of the actions of others, and since we are all naturally inclined to judge according to the particular affections of our own spirit, it is inevitable that a person accustomed to observe and criticise other people's actions should very often fall into error.

3. It is well known that everywhere, in every state of life, and in every social class there are cramped spirits whose horizon does not extend beyond the private and public life of their neighbor. This is surely a great disgrace, and it may well be esteemed a genuine spiritual infirmity; but with the grace of God and a little reflection and study

of the patient, it can be cured. Let these spiritual patients remember the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and meditate seriously on it. According to this great master in theology, the propensity not only to judge but even to suspect the righteousness of one's neighbor nearly always proceeds from one of the following causes: either the person himself is bad and thus perhaps unconsciously judges others by his own standard, or he entertains some bad feelings towards them, such as displeasure, envy, hatred or contempt for them; and therefore naturally experiences a certain secret complacency in thinking evil about them, and for the same reason he believes easily all that gives him delight and pleasure. (1)

This teaching of the Angel of the Schools should suffice, at least for the sake of well understood self-love and honor, to restrain us from misjudging so easily our brethren; because according to these profound observations of St. Thomas, suspicions and unfavorable judgments portray our own soul rather than that of our neighbor. In photography the negative images remain invisible until chemical agents reveal them. In the same way the series of evil suspicions or judgments regarding our neighbor reveals the bottom of our heart and the images and feelings that animate the same. When we notice that some good observer has perceived our pitiless judgments against our

(1) St. Thomas II. 11, Q. a. LX. a. 3.



brethren, we should blush for having manifested something which even decency should prompt us to keep closely concealed. When we are so weak as to take pleasure in uncharitable thoughts, we may well say to our heart: *My poor heart, your unkind thoughts of your brother, tell me only too plainly what you really are.*

4. But if these motives of propriety are not enough to restrain us from rash judgments, those of conscience should be decisive. St. Thomas after the above mentioned reflections, studies the moral aspect of the question and reasons as follows: *When somebody, on account of slight indications, commences to doubt about the goodness of his neighbor, he sins venially. But when by the same slight indications, he holds the malice of his neighbor for certain or for granted, and this in a grave matter, then he is guilty of mortal sin, because this can not be without contempt of his neighbor.* (2) St. Paul is still more severe in this well known passage: *Wherefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest. For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself.* (3) And to the Corinthians he said: *Judge not before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.* (4)

(2) St. Thomas II. 11, Q. LX. a. 3.

(3) Rom. II. 1.

(4) I Cor. IV. 5.

But the most convincing and that without any appeal against him who judges his neighbor, is from the lips of eternal truth, our Lord Jesus Christ: *Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven . . . For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.* (5) The word of our divine Savior is decisive. At our judgment He will apply to each one of us the same standards with which we have judged our neighbor. The poor souls that suffer from this mania of judging their neighbor, and who for the smallest reason that does not seem good to them are inclined to think evil of him, should meditate daily on these terrifying words of the Gospel. No matter how incredible it may seem, God who is essentially holy and virtue itself, judges us more mercifully than we do our brother, and leads us more fatherly; He is not surprised at our defects, for we read in the Book of Wisdom: *Thou being master of power, judgest with tranquillity; and with great favor disposest of us.* (6) Since God warns us that He has reserved to Himself the right of judgment, (7) and that He is not in a hurry to judge us, but on the contrary, notwithstanding our faults looks on us kindly and with great favor disposes our affairs, then we must not anticipate

(5) Luk. VI. 37, 38.

(6) Wis. XII. 8.

(7) Deut. I. 17.

His judgments by judging our brother, for we know that by acting thus, we prepare the sentence that Divine Justice will pronounce against us when we appear to render an account of our life.

5. It is true we nearly always judge without malice, but through ignorance or fickleness, yet it is expedient not to rely too much on such excuses. Though it is true that ignorance powerfully lessens the guilt of our actions—and woe to us if it is not so—it is also equally true that we are bound to know the laws which regulate the charity and justice due our neighbor. It is a fact that real hatred or ill will are not masked for long in a person consecrated to God, but it is also true that one can not entertain the habit of thinking evil of others without lodging in his heart some disdain or contempt, some resentment or envy against those whom we so easily judge rashly, because we can scarcely ever entertain rash-judgments against those whom we esteem and love much. The habit therefore of thinking evil of our neighbor supposes nearly always meanness of heart and places us in great danger of committing hideous sins against charity and justice.

6. Moreover, each one can experience by himself, how a rash judgment is really a moral auto-intoxication. Whenever we allow our imagination to ramble about other people's lives, we notice that we are resentful towards them, we do not feel so gentle, and find it somewhat hard to be indulgent and amiable to them; whoever thinks evil, poi-

sons himself. From this want of interior silence proceeds another inexhaustible source of faults, the innumerable sins of the tongue. Our words enshroud our ideas and express our sentiments; each one talks as he thinks and feels. Sometimes the exterior word is at variance with the interior word or thought. But to do it always, to pretend always, is impossible. And therefore it is impossible that he who ordinarily thinks evil can always speak well. Conscience, education, and prudence may help him to be careful in words; but if he is accustomed to think unfavorably of his neighbor, he will often speak to the detriment of charity or of justice; for after all it is always true: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* (8). as our Lord tells us. If the custom therefore of thinking evil springs from the want of interior silence, from this also proceeds the facility with which we criticise the actions of our neighbor. The custom of thinking evil is the mother of that numerous and wretched offspring, sins of the tongue. Their number is legion, and their ravages in the world and in the cloister, God alone can know.

7. We can not appreciate the destruction caused by a rock that has been dislodged from the top of a mountain, until it stops in the valley below. A slanderous word is like a weight drawn out of the heart and dropped down a precipice

(8) Matt. XXII. 34.



whose depths we can not measure. This word generally contains much bitterness, a little resentment and anger, some envy and jealousy, and always much selfishness. It is an arrow shot by a wounded heart that passes from one heart to another, from one conscience to another. To every one it communicates some of its poison and bitterness, and it increases proportionally with the poison of those who are already affected by its touch. Its passage over souls is more disastrous than the friction of the most loathsome reptile on the fairest flowers. Here it dissipates certain innocent and pure aspirations; there it communicates its poison to souls who had lived united in happiness and confidence. To these who had been so happy, it leaves a little of its malice, and those who had harbored mutual distrust it separates definitively, putting between them, so to speak, a block of ice if not mountains of hatred. When shall there be a stop to these icy waves launched forth by a cold and restless heart in moments of imprudent confidences? God alone knows, as He also alone knows the destruction they cause.

This is not the place to study the sins of the tongue in their various forms. There are great volumes written on this matter. We have only to say that all the inconveniences attending rash judgments are applicable to slander and fault-finding with the aggravating circumstance that because their action is exterior, their field is con-

sequently much vaster. This is not the case with mere rash judgments, because of themselves they harm only the person who forms and admits them. We said that rash judgment was an auto-intoxication; but fault-finding poisons all the souls to whom it extends. A drop of poison infiltrated into the blood, running rapidly through veins and arteries, and destroying the vital principles of an organic being, is not so active as is often a single mischievous word, perhaps imprudently uttered and dropped into a poor heart. It cools charity so easily, destroys the most delicate sensibility, and poisons the finest sentiments. It is a malefactor of the worst stamp, who knowingly launches an insidious word on a person who was happy giving and receiving affections which were just, innocent, and pure.

8. Each one can study within himself the disastrous effects of slander when he hears it about one of whom he has a good opinion. The least it leaves behind is a little doubt. One becomes a little suspicious and distrustful, and then begins to observe that person. If the slander touched all, we shall begin to observe all. And only a saint can bear without blemish the constant observation of a keen and distrustful spirit. The defects of those under observation are disproportionally magnified before our distrustful spirit; and therefore it will be very difficult for us to be affectionate towards them and show them confidence. There can be no doubt that when we slan-

der we produce in the soul of our hearers the same effects that we feel when we hear others slandering.

9. Sins of the tongue are the worst enemies of charity, and consequently of peace and of confidence. Therefore the Holy Ghost tells us: *A wicked word shall change the heart out of which four manner of things arise; good and evil, life and death; and the tongue is the ruler of them.* (9) We must not wonder then that the Holy Scripture is so severe against sins of the tongue. The Holy Ghost, who tells us that the same judgment that we form about our brethren shall be applied to us on the day of judgment, tells us also: *By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.* (10) This watchfulness over the tongue is considered absolutely necessary to live in peace, as St. Peter says: *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.* (11) The Wise Man went further and said: *Happy and blessed is the man whose tongue has never been a stumbling block to him.* But on the other hand He added this terrible sentence which our Father St. John of the Cross mentions in this precaution: *If any man thinks himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue . . . This man's*

(9) Eccl. XXXVII. 21.

(10) Matt. XII. 37.

(11) I. Pet. III. 10.

*religion is vain.* (12) According to this sentence the unbridled tongue renders useless the good works of persons consecrated to God. The consideration of the many and terrible evils that come to souls who aspire after perfection, but who are careless about interior and exterior silence, should be to all the children and clients of St. John of the Cross a very powerful inducement to practise this precaution.

10. According to St. John of the Cross another danger threatens the observer of other men's actions. It is the consequence of the two evils we have been studying: *Take warning*, he tells us, *from the example of Lot's wife, who, because she was disturbed at the destruction of Sodom and turned back to see it . . . God punished her for it, and she was turned into a pillar of salt.* Both times that our holy Father speaks on this subject, he brings forward the example of Lot's wife converted into a pillar of salt, for he saw in this a resemblance of what happens to poor souls who, more through inclination than through prudent charity or duty of their office, occupy themselves with other people's actions. These poor souls also are turned into pillars of salt, for they acquire some of its saline qualities. Salt stone is hard, and the hearts of those who take pleasure in meddling with other people's affairs become hardened. He who indulges in criticising



his neighbor, can not conserve his heart tender and full of goodness and kindness towards his brethren. Moreover, salt is a sign of barrenness; no life is developed near rocks of salt, as is the case with the famous salt mountains of Cardona. Sometimes they seem very beautiful; but they never fail to cause sadness. When the variegated facets of their crystallized tops disperse the rays of the sun, they produce beautiful scenes. But innocent little birds do not sing on them, nor can the many and beautiful flowers that perfume the other mountains of Spain grow on them.

11. We often find ourselves among persons who, not through duty nor charity, but for pure pastime, occupy themselves in criticising their neighbor. Some of these persons may at times charm us for a little while, but soon we feel chilled in their midst. Some of them think well and speak still better; they are real artists who reproduce marvelously the weaknesses that are hidden in the depths of the human soul. But nearly all these critics either through inclination or bad taste, these keen observers of the weaknesses of the external actions of their neighbor, they all seem to render everything around them barren, because they destroy, or at least inhibit, the life of the soul. Their fine observations, their skill in locating the weak point, their hard and merciless criticism, cause persons of generous heart to feel oppressed in their company. What a misfortune to have such persons in the community. Near

them there is only barrenness, just as near the rocks of salt where no life can develop itself.

12. In the designs of Divine Providence a religious house should be a delightful garden, where the tree of love is preserved in full luxuriance. It was to plant this tree in the heart and conscience of men that Jesus Christ came into this world. It is here that the great commandment of Christ must be preserved in all its newness: *Love one another as I have loved you*. The atmosphere of a religious house should be one of peace and mutual confidence; confidence and peace are like the combined perfume of all the Christian and religious virtues. But it is impossible for simple and frank confidence to exist where restless and dissatisfied spirits abound, who observe every one to have afterwards the pleasure of criticising them. Such people have the disgrace—and it is disgrace indeed—of considering others only from their weakest side; for the same reason they always take pleasure in hard and merciless criticism. Where there are such spirits, confidence disappears, people assume an attitude of reserve which soon degenerates and grows cold, and finally ends in jealousy and suspicion. Eventually all the charm of religious life disappears completely. To the sincere affection which likens a religious house to a great family, there succeeds a rigid formalism which dries the heart and petrifies the soul, while the spirit of religious legisla-

tion, which is a spirit of love, of charity, and mutual confidence soon disappears.

On the day that such slandering spirits abound in any religious congregation, that religious house, instead of being a mansion of peace and virtue, will be a field sown with salt where life is impossible. Therefore our holy Father recommends in convents such absolute abstraction from all that does not concern us, that none of his children may be turned into a pillar of salt. It is certain that while we live among men in this world we shall have to bear with the weaknesses of others, and they in turn will have to bear with ours; but we should live among them as though we never noticed their faults. Our Father wants us not to notice them, nor think of them, and much less speak about them.

13. At times we ought to speak charitably to the person who committed a fault. But never speak to others except to the superior, and even this very seldom and always in a spirit of charity. Our holy Father says: *Neither under the pretext of zeal nor of correction say anything, except to him who of right should be spoken to, and then at the proper time.* If you know that the superior is aware of the fault, you have nothing to say. If after your admonition things go on as before, you must not disturb yourself nor inquire any more about it. Live as if you saw nothing and as if you alone lived in the monastery. Your great care should be to practise the virtue contrary to

the fault you have noticed in others. It is said of a prudent and holy superior that he applied this remedy to a religious who, agitated by indiscreet zeal, denounced a violation of the rule as more or less grave. He received the accuser kindly, and said to him: "I am grateful to you, my dear son, for this zeal for the glory of God and the observance of the rule. And as you think that God has been offended and the rules violated, I permit you to fast today, and I am grateful for your reparation of this fault."

14. If all persons who experience so much restlessness on account of the faults of others, would themselves use this wise prescription, or if we would impose on ourselves the obligation, which in a certain sense we have, of repairing and expiating the faults we see in our brother, and of practising most assiduously the virtues opposed to the faults, it is certain we would be less curious in heeding what is going on around us and would exercise a greater care for our own personal sanctification. We would likewise observe better this precaution of our holy Father; we would think and speak less about others, and religious houses would be mansions of unalterable peace, real ante-chambers of heaven.

Through the exact fulfillment of these three precautions we shall learn to refrain completely from occupying ourselves with the affairs of our neigh-



bor and from attachment to earthly things, and thus preserving our love well regulated, we shall overcome completely one of our greatest enemies—the world.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PRECAUTIONS AGAINST THE DEVIL—PREFACE—

#### POWER OF THE DEVIL

1. WORDS OF THE SAINT.—2. BELIEF IN THE POWER OF EVIL SPIRITS. TESTIMONY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE. DIABOLICAL SPIRIT OPPOSED TO THE CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH.—3. NEITHER INCREDULOUS NOR FANATIC.—4. BEATITUDE IS A REWARD. IT REQUIRES ONE'S CO-OPERATION. THE DEVIL TRIES TO FRUSTRATE IT.—5. HE HAS SPECIAL INTEREST IN TEMPTING THE GOOD. WORTH OF A PERFECT SOUL. THEY HIDE THEMSELVES. THE DEVIL CANNOT EASILY RUIN THEM; HE CAN DISTURB THEM.—6. THE MASK OF THE ENEMY OF SOULS.—7. NOTABLE PASSAGE FROM ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS ON DIFFERENT DELUSIONS OF THE DEVIL.—8. MANY PEOPLE SEEM TO BE GOOD AND LIVE DELUDED; HOW MUCH THEY HARM THEMSELVES AND OTHERS.—9. THEY WOULD BE HORRIFIED IF THEY KNEW IT. SINCERE EXAMINATION. THE DEVIL IS SATISFIED WITH MANY GOOD PERSONS.

1. *He who aspires to religious perfection must take three precautions to free himself from the devil, his second enemy. For this purpose it must be noted, that among the many devices of Satan to deceive spiritual persons, the most ordinary is to deceive them by an appearance of good; he does not tempt them by what seems to be evil. He knows well they will scarcely regard that which they know to be evil. You must therefore always distrust that which seems to be good, and espe-*

*cially when obedience does not intervene. Safety here is the direction of one whom you ought to consult.*

2. The influence of evil spirits over men is certainly not a fancy of ignorant piety, or of blind fanaticism. It is a belief as old as humanity. It is found in all countries, in all religions. It is a dogma of mankind. It is presupposed in many practices of our holy religion, and it is bound up with all its fundamental dogmas. If this belief were suppressed, we should be compelled to withdraw all our books of piety, to correct all theology and Catholic liturgy, and what is more, it would be necessary to re-write the entire Scriptures, inasmuch as they so frequently speak of the devil and warn us against his craft. Our Redeemer Himself says that the enemy who sowed the cockle in the field of the good father of the family was no other than the devil. (1) And St. Paul exhorts us: *Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil.* (2) In another part of Holy Scripture we find this terrible passage, so clear and decisive and which contains the principles of the teachings of our Father St. John of the Cross in his three precautions against the devil.

*And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who*

(1) Mat. XIII. 39.

(2) Eph. VI. 11.

*seduced the whole world; and he was cast into the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying: Woe to the earth, and to the sea, because the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath. . . . And the dragon was angry against the woman; and went to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.* (3) The woman against whom the devil was angry was the Church; the rest of her seed against whom he went to make war, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Christ, are all men and especially the faithful. It would therefore be heretical and blasphemous to deny the influence of the devil in the world, for it would be contrary to Holy Scripture and to the testimony of Christ Himself. Whoever admits in theory the possibility of evil spirits and then pretends to relegate it in practice to ridicule and as being useful to frighten or entertain ignorant people, would show himself to be very ignorant or at least very superficial in his judgments. The great saints and Doctors of the Church, who were not fond of futilities, paid great attention to this question.

3. But if it would be heretical and blasphemous to deny diabolical influence in the world, it would be just as ridiculous and as perilous to fancy diabolical action in every event of human

(3) Apoc. XII. 9, etc.



life. There is no room for incredulity or fanaticism in this matter. The truth in this question is very simple. The devil on account of his hatred against God and jealousy towards man, because of the everlasting bliss awaiting him in heaven, is most anxious to mislead and ruin us. For each sin he makes us commit he procures a new offense against God and separates the sinner more from eternal bliss. If he does not succeed in ruining a soul completely, he satisfies himself in doing as much harm as he can. He has great interest and takes great pleasure in all that can in any way deprive God of His glory and men of their happiness, which agrees with his pride and jealousy. To succeed in this wicked aim, he relies on the tremendous resources of his own nature and the extreme weakness of human nature. *The devil provokes us to evil, and the world and the flesh are his instruments*, says St. Thomas Aquinas. (4)

4. But God does not allow him to attempt us beyond our strength, and therefore we know well that with the grace of God and our own diligence we can overcome him. Beatitude is certainly a gift of the infinite mercy of God, but He will not grant it to us without effort on our part and thus in a certain sense we have to merit it. God does not wish to bestow life everlasting on those who have reached the use of reason as a mere gift;

(4) I-Q-CXIV a-2.

He wishes it to be a reward of virtue. *As for the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice,* said St. Paul, *replete with joy. Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown,* said the Lord to the Bishop of Philadelphia. *For to him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with me in my throne.* (5) If it is a crown of justice, it is not a mere gift, it has some character of reward. If it is necessary to watch that nobody may carry off the crown that has been promised to us, if it is given as a reward to him who overcomes, it supposes combat and combat requires personal effort. It is true that this effort and this combat of persons as weak as we are, against such powerful enemies as the devils, would be entirely useless without divine grace and inherent special aids. The attainment then of eternal life and also of virtue suppose first of all divine grace, and next our constant co-operation throughout life. The devil knows this well, and as he can do nothing against God directly, he uses all his power and craftiness in destroying or at least in impairing our co-operation with divine grace.

5. It is clear that the enemy of mankind is more interested in disturbing the good than in instigating to new sins those who are wallowing in crimes and vices. With these he has little to do; to them he leaves as his delegates and instruments the world and the flesh, and they themselves

(5) Opoc. III. 11, 12.

work out their own perdition, for one sin drags another after it and *deep calleth on deep*. (6) But he does not tempt in this way virtuous persons or those whose main profession is a virtuous life. The enemy understands souls and how much they can do to harm him. A perfect religious, a saintly sister, a secular person of consummate virtue, these are treasures of infinite value. God alone knows their worth, we can only surmise it. A single perfect soul is worth hundreds and thousands of average souls. One of them can compensate for all the sins of a community and even for the sins of a nation. Of them we can say what was said of our dear Lord, that He *went about doing good*. (7)

These souls ordinarily make very little noise, but silently diffuse around them the perfume of Christ mentioned by the Apostle. (8) As flowers diffuse their fragrance and embalm the air and delight the passer-by, so do these persons without pretending and even without knowing, do good to all who approach them. Happy the religious house where such a person dwells; and there are some in each house. That these souls may be somewhat hidden from the gaze of others in the community, and especially that they may not see their own virtue, God permits some de-

(6) Ps. XLI. 8.

(7) Act. X. 38.

(8) II Cor. II. 15.

fects of character, of temperament, of special psychology, to hedge in their beautiful virtues; but their perfume is more or less breathed in the whole monastery. Who, no matter how short a time he may have lived in a religious house, has not felt the presence of these persons? It is not easy for the devil to ruin these nor those who have seriously resolved to walk on the same road. To this last class belong all of us who have made our religious profession. But if it is difficult, though not impossible, for the evil spirit to ruin us completely, it is very easy for him to disturb us and cause us much harm. Ordinarily he will not endeavor to make a religious commit mortal sin, but he will prevent the attainment and realization of a great number of excellent virtues. If the devil can hinder a religious from attaining to perfection, can keep him indolently in a mediocre state, living a languid, idle life of routine, one full of imperfections and venial sins; this is certainly more positive gain than if he induces those already engulfed in vices to add a hundred and even a thousand links to their chain of perdition. For the same reason, he labors more to hinder the perfection of a religious than to increase the number of mortal sins in his faithful servants and wretched followers.

6. For this reason also saints and spiritual directors, though they make efforts to convert sinners, make still greater efforts to advance those



who are on the road to perfection and to deliver them from the deceits of the devil. Our Father St. John of the Cross, before consigning to us his three precautions against the devil, gives us a very important advice; he tells us that the enemy nearly always tempts religious persons under the cloak of some good: *Because he knows well that they will scarcely regard that which they know to be evil.* It is clear that a person consecrated to God, if he has not completely lost his vocation, will not take an entirely vicious attitude. He may commit knowingly several isolated faults more or less noticeable, but it is not possible that he can assume for long an attitude openly opposed to his religious vocation. To do this it is necessary that the spirit of error should dominate him, and become so inveterate as to make him believe that his manner of thinking is preferable to that of other people, and that his attitude is perfectly safe. In this way self-esteem is fostered, the soul is no longer tormented with remorse of conscience, pride is encouraged, contempt of his neighbor fomented, while blindness and obstinacy of spirit are daily on the increase. Therefore our holy Father remarks in many places of his admirable books, that the devil deceives spiritual persons by placing before them some apparent good. *The devil knows too well how to insinuate into souls a secret and sometimes an open self-satisfaction. For this end he frequently presents to the eyes the forms of saints and most beautiful lights; he*

*causes voices well dissembled to strike the ear, and delicious odors the smell; he produces sweetness in the mouth, and thrills of pleasure in the sense of touch; and makes us long for such things that he may lead us astray into much evil. (9)*

In another place the saint shows how the devil tries to imitate divine communications imparted to the soul in order to deceive it the better: *Satan, in general, comes to the soul in the ways and methods of God, suggesting to it communications so much resembling those of God and insinuating himself as a wolf in sheep's clothing among the flock, that he can scarcely be detected. For as the evil spirit announces many things that are true, comformable to reason, and certain men may be most easily deluded, thinking that as the prophecy corresponded with the event, it could be none other than God who had spoken. They do not reflect how very easy it is for one endowed with clear natural light, to understand in their causes many matters which have been or may be done. Such a one will accurately guess at many things to come. And as the devil is endowed with such a clear light, he is able to infer such results from such causes; though they are not such as he describes them, because all things depend on the will of God. (10)* The damage which the malignant spirit causes the incautious after the manner

(9) II Ascent XI.

(10) II Ascent. 21.

here described is certainly very great. Here also lies the main strength of spiritism; if all were absolutely fraud, it could do very little harm; but when one thing is proved to be right, we are made to believe a hundred lies. It is very interesting to the evil spirit, that arch-enemy of truth and meekness, that our mind is open to some error, especially on matters of morality, and that we should cleave to it tenaciously. Of course such a one will never reach any degree of perfection, even if the error is not of any great importance; what matters here is that the person lives in error as regards himself.

8. It is not rare to find, both in religious houses and among Christians in the world, a great number of persons who in practice are far removed from the teaching of the Gospel, and notwithstanding they consider themselves very good, or at least superior to many about them. They believe that their way of thinking is most correct; that their actions are most efficacious for promoting every good work. But these good people have generally imbibed as much egotism and pride as their heart is full of good intentions. It is evident that the more they esteem their intentions, the more obstinately they adhere to the error which fosters them and the more aggressive are they towards those who can not see things as they do. But the truth is that this form of good intentions is the ruin of monasteries; is the most powerful arm the devil can use against the friends of God; and not seldom



does he disturb the mansions of peace and charity.

9. Such persons would be terrified, if they could be persuaded that their virtue is nothing more than a most refined egotism; and yet this delicate egotism informs and animates the actions of many. If they were sure that if it is not the evil spirit himself who inspires many of their good actions, he is at least pleased with them, they could not live one single day longer the life they have perhaps led for many long years. In the performance of their actions very little attention has been paid to God; the glory of God occupied nearly always the first place in their words, but perhaps the last place in the innermost part of their hearts. Thus many years spent in supposed virtue have been useless for the sanctification of these persons, and they have merited nothing for eternal life. *Many Christians, says our Father St. John of the Cross, have some virtues and perform great works, but they will profit them nothing for eternal life, because they did not seek in them the honor and glory due to God, but rather the vain satisfaction of their own hearts.* (11)

Perhaps a five minutes' sincere examination of conscience with humble prayer to God for enlightenment, would be sufficient to convince many of the above persons that their spirit is not according to the Gospel; that their meekness and



humility, their abnegation and their charity, do not agree with the model bequeathed by our Divine Redeemer, and which we vowed to follow. What more could the evil spirit wish than to frustrate such excellent virtue in the dearest friends of God? It is very mediocre for a soul consecrated to God to be satisfied with avoiding mortal sins only, without taking any care of making progress in religious perfection. The devil is quite content if he succeeds in gaining this point. Our holy Father, after having warned us that the devil hides himself under the appearance of some good, gives us three precautions to enable us to free ourselves from his snares. We shall explain each of them separately.

## CHAPTER IX

### FOURTH PRECAUTION, AND THE FIRST AGAINST THE DEVIL

#### —LIVE ALWAYS UNDER OBEDIENCE—

1. WORDS OF THE SAINT.—2. HOW PLEASING TO GOD IS OBEDIENCE.—3. THROUGH OBEDIENCE MAN RECEIVES THE BLESSING OF GOD.—4. TWO MOTTOS, NON SERVIAM, AND FIAT VOLUNTAS TUA.—5. CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL. BROTHERS, SISTERS AND MOTHER OF JESUS. HE WHO NEITHER DECEIVES NOR EXAGGERATES.—6. OBEDIENCE, THE BASIS OF ALL ORDER AND GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS.—7. MERIT OF GOOD WORKS LIES IN OBEDIENCE. ISAIAS, ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—8. TESTIMONY OF ST. TERESA. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT OBEDIENCE.—9. WHY THE SAINTS ARE SO ZEALOUS FOR OBEDIENCE. ENTIRE SACRIFICE OF MAN TO GOD.—10. WE CANNOT RECLAIM WHAT WE HAVE ONCE GIVEN TO GOD. RELIGIOUS WHO ELUDE OBEDIENCE COMMIT A KIND OF SACRILEGE.—11. NECESSITY OF ACQUIRING THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE. ADMIRABLE TESTIMONY OF HEDLEY. A GOOD CITIZEN, BUT NOT A GOOD RELIGIOUS.

*1. Let the first precaution be that you never set about anything, however good and charitable it may seem either to yourself or to anybody else, whether in the community or out of it, except under obedience, unless you are bound to do it by the rule of your order. If you do this you will*

*gain merit and be in security. Fly from self and you will be safe against the devil, you will also avoid evils of which you are ignorant, and of which God will ask an account one day. If you do not observe this, both in little things and in great, notwithstanding your apparent progress, Satan will most certainly deceive you little or much. Even if your whole error consist in your not being guided in all things by obedience, you are plainly wrong, for God wants obedience rather than sacrifice, and the actions of a religious are not his own, but belong to obedience, and if he withdraws them from obedience, he will have to account of them as lost.*

2. The first precaution our Father St. John of the Cross gives us against the craftiness of the devil is complete and sincere obedience. He does not tell us never to act against obedience, for this is known to be evil in itself. But he wants all our actions to be regulated by obedience in such a manner that, if they are not executed by order of this virtue, he does not wish us to perform even those actions which are in themselves good and holy. First and foremost he requires obedience, and this very reasonably; for obedience is a tribute we owe to God, the Creator and supreme Legislator. To obey God is an act of justice and an acknowledgment of His infinite power and majesty. All great souls, because they are righteous and just, are also obedient. Therefore the Holy Ghost tells us: *The mind of the just studieth*

*obedience.* (1) It is so pleasing to the Lord because it is a sacrifice, not of our goods but of our reason. Our holy Father said most beautifully in his incomparable style: *A single thought of man is worth more than the whole world, and for this reason God alone is worthy of it, and to Him alone it is due. Every thought of man therefore which is not given to God is a robbery.* (2) Because by the virtue of obedience we have consecrated and subjected to God not only our actions and the thoughts that give them morality, but also our reason, the source of our thoughts. Obedience is therefore the first and the greatest tribute man can pay to his Creator, because it is the tribute or subjection of reason to God; it is that *spirit of servitude in justice*, (3) which the Wise Man wishes should direct all the actions of man.

3. For this reason the Lord bestows all His blessings on perfect obedience. If in Abraham He blessed all the nations, it was to reward the submissive and simple obedience of the holy Patriarch to the voice of God. (4) The Father of Believers is also the Father of submissive and obedient souls. Even if one could be perfect without being obedient, he would have no merit. It is to the obedience of Jesus to His eternal Father that we owe our redemption, for when He was

(1) Prov. XV. 28.

(2) Max. 240.

(3) Prov. II. 1.

(4) Gen. XXII. 18.



about to deliver Himself into the hands of the executioners He uttered these divine words: *The prince of this world cometh, and in me he hath not anything. But that the world may know, that I love the Father; and as the Father hath given me commandment, so do I; Arise, let us go hence.*

(5) This great spirit of love and obedience sent Him forth to meet His enemies and to deliver Himself to them. That His obedience may profit each of us St. Peter exhorts us: *Casting away all uncleanness, and abundance of naughtiness, with meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

(6) Therefore our holy Father says that perfect obedience is necessary to attain perfection and peace of soul: *What you endeavor to obtain, and what you most covet, you will not attain by your own way, nor by the highest contemplation, but through much obedience and submission of your heart.* (7)

4. It is no wonder that this great master of the spiritual life should recommend obedience as our indestructible and necessary armor against the evil spirit, since the spirit of simple obedience is most directly opposed to the diabolical spirit. The motto of Satan and his angels is: *Non serviam. I will not serve* (8); whereas the device

(5) John XIV. 30, 31.

(6) St. Jas. I. 21, 22.

(7) Max. 36.

(8) Jer. II. 20.

of our Divine Redeemer Who conquered the world, and through Whom we also shall conquer is: *Father, not my will, but thine be done.* (9) He also tells us that He did not come into the world, but to do the will of His heavenly Father. (10)

5. Since through the malice of the devil, disobedience and stubbornness have been and still are the beginning of all evil, Divine Providence has ordained that our redemption and the source of all our good should depend on obedience and humble submissiveness: *As by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners; so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just.* (11) Our tender Redeemer addressed to those who rejected His teaching these terrible words: *Why do you not know my speech? Because you can not hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you will do. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is liar, and the father thereof.* (12) According to this infallible testimony of uncreated Truth, the devil, as he is the first father of all lies so is he also of all disobedience; and obstinate souls contract a certain affiliation with him.

On the other hand as a counter-view to this terrible passage, when the same dear Lord was preaching on a certain day, they announced to

(9) Luk. XXII. 24.

(10) Heb. X. 9.

(11) Rom. V. 19.

(12) John VIII. 43, 44.

Him that His Mother was waiting to see Him. He answered: *Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?* And stretching forth His hands towards His disciples, He said: *Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.* (13) This passage contains the greatest and fullest praise of the obedience that man can render, and it also contains the most terrible anathema against disobedience and stubbornness. Let us remember that He who speaks in this way is Christ, our Lord, Who can not exaggerate either when praising or when censuring, because He is infinitely true and just. If He casts aside as children of Satan the disobedient and stubborn, on the other hand He declares the sincerely obedient to be His friends, and more than friends, they form His chosen family. Each of these souls is to Jesus Christ, His brother, His sister, and His mother. The most holy Virgin was dear to Jesus, not so much because she was His Mother, as that she was the creature who accomplished the will of God with the greatest humility, purity, and promptness. This eulogy which our Lord bestowed on the virtue of obedience is marvellous, and this alone should more than suffice to make every religious love obedience. Obstinate disobedience, according to Holy Scripture, makes men children of the devil,

whereas sincere obedience makes them chosen members of the family of Jesus Christ.

6. All the saints and all great souls have been lovers of the virtue of obedience; they willed it and practised it, because this virtue is the foundation of both the religious life and social order, and nothing else can be substituted in its place. Without obedience to law and authority as long as it represents the law, it is not possible to find civic virtue in society, nor Christian virtue in the Church, and still less monastic virtue in religious houses. Charity and obedience constitute the whole of the moral-religious order. Charity is the whole, because all virtues are related to it as to the crown of religious practices. Obedience also is the whole, because without it as a foundation, there is nothing solid in religion nor in any other order. Man is never so great as when he bows his head to obey: *The sons of wisdom, says the Holy Ghost, are the church of the just; and their generation, obedience and love.* (14) God always blesses those who are obedient and renders their actions fruitful. That is why Holy Scripture tells us: *An obedient man shall speak of victory.* (15) and a venerable English bishop said: *It is a special gift to know how to succeed in every enterprise, and this seems to be the reward of obedience, for God blesses everything that is undertaken by holy obedience.*

(14) Eccl. III. 1.

(15) Prov. XXI. 28.



7. It is obedience that principally gives efficacy and merit to our good actions. Their strength lies in the spirit of obedience with which they are commenced and carried on, and their moral value in the interior submission to Him in whose honor they are performed. A little work done in the spirit of obedience is of infinite value to him who executes it, and may even be the beginning of admirable works. Unsuccessful talent is found everywhere. But religious orders and the Church itself, on the contrary, are full of admirable works accomplished by the simple and humble who perform them in virtue of holy obedience. The sacrifices and holocausts of the Old Testament were excellent, and fasts are still most laudable. All these things the Israelites offered to God, but the Lord was not appeased by them; as we read in Isaias they complained to God saying: *Why have we fasted and thou has not regarded; have we humbled our souls, and thou hast not taken notice?....* And they heard this laconic answer: *Behold in the day of your fast your own will was found.* (16) As if the Lord had said: I know that you have fasted and have offered me victims, but all this that is good and commanded in the law, you have not done with the spirit of submission to my will, but only because it was pleasing to yourselves.

(16) Isaias. LVII. 3.

It is therefore no wonder that our Father St. John of the Cross, speaking of those who perform great penances without permission, wrote the following severe passage: *These are full of imperfections, unreasonable people, who undervalue submission and obedience, which is the penance of the reason and the judgment, and therefore a more acceptable and sweet sacrifice unto God than all bodily penances. Bodily penance, leaving aside the other, is nothing else than the penance of animals, to which they are also moved for the sake of the pleasure and taste they find in it.* (17) No greater eulogy of obedience, nor a more severe reprehension against those who neglect it even to devote themselves to great penances, has come from the pen of any saint, not even of a saint like St. John of the Cross. The austere reformer of Carmel, the great lover of the cross of Christ, and perhaps the greatest miracle of penance in modern times, is indignant against those who disregard the holy virtue of obedience and who, of their own accord, perform corporal penances without the sanction of obedience. He calls them most imperfect and senseless, comparable to irrational animals. What would our holy Father say of those who not only do not care for obedience, but who positively act against this holy virtue? And what if they were to act in this manner, not to devote themselves to austere penances,

but to perform actions more or less forbidden by the rule or by the superior? With what words would the saint condemn their conduct?

8. Our holy Mother Teresa of Jesus was of the same opinion, though she does not use such severe language: *In this matter of obedience I should perhaps be more explicit, but because it seems to me that without obedience one cannot be a nun, I say nothing about it for I am speaking to nuns, and in my estimation to good nuns or at least they wish to be good; therefore in such a well-known and important matter no more than one word is necessary, not to forget it. I say then that whoever lives under a vow of obedience and is not most careful to fulfill this vow with all perfection, I can not understand why she is in the convent. At least I assure her that while she fails in this matter, she will never become a contemplative and and not even a good active religious. This I hold for very certain.* (18).

9. All the saints consider the virtue of obedience as the basis of Christian virtue, as the necessary foundation for community life in monasteries, and for the sanctification of each individual. If this foundation is undermined even in some points only the whole edifice will tumble down. A religious without true obedience will never become perfect, and a religious congregation in which the bonds of obedience are relaxed

will shortly find itself sentenced to death, if an energetic remedy is not soon applied. Therefore our Father St. John of the Cross tells us in this precaution: *Never set about anything however good and charitable it may be, either for yourself or for anybody else, whether in or out of the community, except under obedience.* And our holy Mother Teresa of Jesus says also: *I believe that when Satan sees that there is no road that leads more quickly to the highest perfection than this of obedience, he suggests many difficulties under the color of some good, to make it distasteful, and let this be marked well and they will see that I say the truth.* (19)

St. Bonaventure does not hesitate to declare that all religious perfection consists in the perfect abnegation of one's will, that is in perfect obedience. For this reason also the first of the religious vows is the vow of obedience, the only one by which man delivers himself up completely into the hands of God. By the vow of poverty we give to God our goods, by that of chastity we renounce sensual pleasures, but by the vow of obedience we renounce our liberty. To renounce our reason and our liberty is nothing else than to deliver ourselves up to God. The vow of obedience therefore is the total sacrifice of man to God.

10. And what has once been given to God can not lawfully be reclaimed, as St. John of the Cross



teaches: *The actions of a religious are not his, for they belong to obedience, and if he withdraws them from it, they will be demanded of him as lost.* And he remarks in another place: *And notice well that if God will ask of every man a strict account for every idle deed, how much more of the religious, whose life and works are consecrated to God.* (20)

To none better than to religious can these words of Holy Scripture be applied: *It is like the sin of witchcraft, to rebel; and like the crime of idolatry, to refuse to obey.* (21) The reason is because by the vow of obedience a religious consecrates his entire person to God, for he consecrates to God his will and his liberty. And therefore when he acts against obedience or without it, he withdraws his actions from the sacred altar of obedience to dedicate them to his caprices, which can not be done without dishonor or contempt of God. And if God was so angry with the sons of Heli because they withdrew some of the flesh of the victims offered in sacrifice (22), how much more will God be displeased with the religious who, having entirely consecrated to God his will, reclaims it, wishing to act according to the desires of his own heart, rather than according to the dictates of obedience?

(20) Max. 4.

(21) I Kings XV. 23.

(22) I Kings II. 19.

11. It is well to remember it is not enough not to break the vow of obedience, it is necessary also to acquire the virtue of obedience. The vow is the means, the virtue is the end; and as means that do not lead to the end are useless, so the vow of obedience has no value before God if it does not incline the religious to a perfect interior submission to the will of God manifested by the rule or by his legitimate superiors. Social or civic education and the necessities of life lay down laws more or less just, and every self-respecting person observes them exactly. It is a question of honor to be obedient to such laws. But this is not religious obedience, which is found more in the spirit than in the external action.

*Obedience may be taken to mean a course of action, or it may be taken to mean the interior impulse with which one acts. It may describe the going round of the hands of the clock on the dial, or it may designate the main spring hidden out of sight. We have to bring it home to our mind and heart in both acceptations; and we will begin with the latter. For in a life of obedience it is the spirit of obedience which is all important. A religious may obey through mere habit, by routine, for the sake of a quiet life, or through mere slavishness of disposition; such a one leads outwardly an obedient life; but he is not obedient. Much less is that religious obedient who obeys to the eye, but rebels inwardly. (23)*

This passage of the venerable prelate of Newport well deserves a little application. For he would not consider a religious obedient who with the exterior performance had not also the spirit of submission to God, Who intimates His will to him by the rule or by the superior. It does not matter that his exterior actions are perfectly in harmony with the command, or that he moves within the sphere assigned him with the same precision that the hands of the clock move on the dial. This exactitude would be sufficient for civic but not for religious virtues. The first would of itself, make a good servant, an excellent employee, a perfect soldier, a model citizen; but it is not enough to make a religious, not even a mediocre one, because the obedience of which we speak is not a civic but a religious virtue.

By the vow of obedience we have made an offering of our person and our liberty to God; but God unlike men, is not satisfied with the appearance, as He tells us by His prophet: *But thou, O Lord of Sabaoth, judgest justly, and triest the reins and the heart.* (24)

(24) Jer. XI. 20.

## CHAPTER X

### THE VOW AND THE VIRTUE OF OBEDIENCE

1. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO KEEP THE VOW, IT IS NECESSARY ALSO TO PRACTISE THE VIRTUE.—2. BETWEEN TWO EXTREMES.—3. SIN IS VERY SELDOM COMMITTED AGAINST THE VOW.—4. HOW SAD A LIFE FRUITLESSLY LABORIOUS.—5. NEITHER GRAVE SINS, NOR SOLID VIRTUES. A TERRIBLE THREAT.—6. LORD, I ALWAYS DID MY WILL, BUT NEVER INTENDED ANYTHING AGAINST THE VOWS. POOR EXCUSE.—7. REPROVE THE USELESS SERVANT NEITHER BREAKING THE VOW NOR ACQUIRING VIRTUE.—8. THE VOW IS THE ROOT, THE VIRTUE IS THE TREE.—9. FIVE GREAT ADVANTAGES OF OBEDIENCE.—10. WORDS OF ST. TERESA.

1. As we have seen in the previous chapter, he can not be considered really obedient who is wanting in interior submission, though he performs exteriorly all that is commanded him. Nor can he expect any reward for his obedience who avails himself of a thousand little artifices more or less objectionable in themselves, or who tries to escape any commands contrary to his taste. In this way he will certainly not go directly counter to the vow of obedience; but as his liberty is hardly restrained, his will can not be considered obedient to God, for he knows how to act as he pleases. Much less can he expect the reward



promised the obedient, who pays but little care to the thousand minor ordinances which make up religious life, but who is most careful to observe all that is formally commanded or forbidden in virtue of holy obedience, which binds a religious under pain of mortal sin.

2. But there is a great difference between perfect obedience and those ordinances that cannot be transgressed without breaking the formal precepts of the vow of obedience. On the one hand we behold our Lord Jesus Christ, whom the sea and winds obeyed, (1) also the unclean spirits, and whom the angels served, (2) and notwithstanding, *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.* (3) On the other hand are the ecclesiastical and moral laws which point out to religious the strict precepts of the vow of obedience, saying to them: "If you go beyond this, you violate grievously the most fundamental of the religious vows, you burden your conscience with a mortal sin, and you become liable to all the rigor of the law you profess."

3. But fortunately this line or that concerning the other vows of religion is very seldom transgressed in religious houses. If in fact there are few who reach that degree of perfect obedi-

(1) Mat. VII. 27.

(2) Mat. IV. 11.

(3) Phil. II. 8.

ence, that they can truly say they have no more self-will in anything, but on the contrary their will in all things coincides with the will of God, nevertheless there are still fewer who deliberately break the vow of obedience when it is formally intimated to them by the rule or by the superior. But between these two extremes of absolute perfection and of total ruin, there is an extensive sphere within which a multitude of religious persons move. Some of them are very near to the supreme ideal of obedience, others farther away, and still others are so very far removed from it that they scarcely have begun to take the first steps. Some others perhaps have not yet made any effort to start; they are busily engaged at the other end. They do not wish to over-step the line and they do not know how to withdraw themselves from it. Like one walking near a barbed fence such religious must take great care not to injure their vows. It is only by continually recalling their conscience that they can enjoy even the shadow of peace.

4. Perhaps it will not be difficult to find in religious houses some persons who are very busy, not precisely in trying to purify themselves from their imperfections or in studying how they can serve God better; but rather seeking how they can solve the difficult problem of living in such a manner, that they can escape drawing on themselves the ill will of their superiors and at the same time enjoy sufficient liberty to follow the

caprices of their own will. These religious are always on the alert to prevent the superior from commanding them anything disagreeable. In this way they do not clash with their conscience nor with their self-love, because on the one hand they honestly believe that they fulfill all the claims of obedience and on the other hand they nearly always do their own will. The condition of such souls is very sad indeed. It is true that in their state of conscience not a single action can be found which can be qualified as mortal sin; but perhaps in some way their condition may be worse, for they are without any stimulus to rouse remorse of conscience, without any incident to bear on their lukewarm and egotistic life.

5. A mortal wound can not be found in those who for a long time have inhaled foul air, but as their whole organism is poisoned they die little by little, their life is so languid that it should be called a slow death rather than real life. So also these poor religious who always avoid obedience as much as they can; though there cannot be found in them a single mortal sin against the vow of obedience or against the other vows, still they live such a poor and wretched spiritual life that it should rather be called death than real religious life. How can these lives, though they are supposed to be free from mortal sin, be offered to Divine Justice to compensate to some extent for the sins of the world? All religious persons enriched with the many special graces which are at-

tached to their vocation and leading virtuous lives, should strive to appease Divine Justice by repairing to some degree for the sins and ingratitude of seculars. This is the purpose of religious houses in the mind of the Church and also in the conscience of Christian people. But a religious who, apart from clearly defined mortal sin, holds back as much as he can of what he had once freely donated to God, and this through a subtle egotism, will surely not make any atonement for the sins of others, he will rather provoke the divine wrath against himself. God can not be pleased with those who seem incapable of doing either good or evil, who feel neither horror for mortal sin nor the salutary effects of ardent charity.

God Himself tells us in the Apocalypse how He considers such persons: *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold, nor hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.* (4) What religious would like to have these words said of him? And yet it is clear that they were spoken of one who was not laden with mortal sin, but who did not experience the fervor of charity. Our Lord casts aside those who are guilty of grievous sin. Lukewarm souls He does not reject entirely. He keeps them before His eyes, they are yet in a state of divine grace; but they are so deformed by their

(4) Apoc. III. 15, 16.



lukewarmness that they provoke Him to nausea and eventually He will have to cast them forth. These words of Holy Scripture should inspire us with fear; but who are more lukewarm than those who never give their will entirely to God, although they have consecrated it to Him by the vow of obedience? God is not so much interested in the goods we give Him by the vow of poverty, nor in our body consecrated to Him by the vow of chastity, nor in all the rest we can offer Him. All these are only means leading to the true and real sacrifice of our own will. If we deprive Him of this sacrifice, what else remains of value in the religious life?

6. When these poor religious who have been so zealous for their own will present themselves before their Judge to give an account of the fruit of their labor, they might well use these apparently simple words. "Lord, during my whole religious life I tried nearly always to do my own will, and very often I succeeded, but at the same time I never tried to do what I knew was openly against my religious vows." This manner of giving an account can neither console nor encourage. Truly our Lord Jesus Christ did not establish the religious life with obedience for its basis and with so many graces attached to it, principally that the columns which were to sustain it might not be pulled down. The religious vows are only the columns of the religious state;

to sin against any of them is to attempt to pull down the supports of the religious state.

The first and most necessary obligation of a religious is to keep his vows faithfully. But it is not his only obligation, for through the faithful observance of his vows he must acquire their corresponding virtues. He may not have broken his vows of obedience or poverty if he never rebelled against his superior nor against the rules, nor used anything as his own; but if he lived nearly always according to his own caprices can it be said that he was an obedient and docile religious? Will he be rewarded for his religious life? He will be treated like the man who was sent in the morning to work in a garden and in the evening had nothing to show he had however been careful not to break any of the plants.

7. Our Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples: *I have chosen you, and have appointed you, that you should go, and should bring forth fruit.* (5) One returned from his mission very much satisfied because he had been careful not to lose what had been entrusted to him, but he had not traded with the money; the Lord said of him: *Take away the talent from him, and give it him that hath ten talents. For to every one that hath, shall be given, and he shall abound; from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away. And the unprofitable servant cast ye out*

(5) John XV. 16.

*into the exterior darkness.* (6) The religious who never broke his vow of obedience but who did not endeavor to acquire the virtue of obedience, will be like the unprofitable servant of the Gospel, who hid his talent in the earth and produced nothing with it. He finally lost all and was cast out himself.

8. From the root deep down in the soil and well nourished with seasonable rains comes forth the shoot, from the shoot the branches, from the branches the flowers and fruits. The vow of obedience is the bitter root which must be laid deep, for it is the interior immolation of our will to God. Properly guarded and cultivated it must, as its natural result, produce the beautiful virtue of obedience; this is like a well-shaped and beautiful trunk from which the different branches proceed, and which produce the most delicate flowers and exquisite fruits. Perfect obedience contains all the other virtues, and as God blesses the obedient religious, he never ceases to be useful to himself and to his order. He is the man who always pleases God and benefits his neighbor. Such is the ideal religious.

9. The advantages of an obedient spirit are many and great:

First, the religious knows that in obeying he is doing what pleases God most. Our holy Mother considered it a great blessing to be

(6) Matt. XXV. 25.

permitted to bind herself by vow to do always what she understood to be the most perfect. Those who have the good fortune of being under obedience in all the details of their life, know that to do what is commanded them is the most perfect for them and the most pleasing to God. Happy the man who does not burden himself with the responsibility of his deliberations and actions.

Second, he has the same merit in everything he does, both in the lowliest and in the highest actions; for his merit does not depend on what he does but on how he does it. Inasmuch as the only motive of his actions is the will of God manifested to him by His legitimate representatives, he merits as much, if the spirit of obedience is equal, as he who performs the highest and most honorable actions according to the world.

Third, he is free from innumerable anxieties about the success of his work, and also from bitter disappointments in the case of failure. Who works under obedience, never fails; because success, which can never fall under obedience, is not commanded; he is merely ordered to do all that lies in his power to obtain the desired end; and having done this he has attained his object, which is to please God by the execution of the obedience. All the rest is of secondary value only.

Fourth, he has a certain right to the divine assistance; for the obedient does not act in his own name but in the name of God. Therefore, when he has done all on his part, he can say to the Lord;



“Lord, I have done my part, what remains is Thine.” How encouraging to speak thus to the Almighty.

Fifth, another advantage may still be added. The obedient religious is in a certain sense impeccable; for as our Father St. John of the Cross says: *He who does not walk in the way of his own pleasure, nor in that of the pleasure which comes from God, nor in that which comes from creatures, and does never his own will in anything, he shall never stumble.* (7)

The devil has no power against the obedient religious, but it is evident we shall not enjoy these advantages without the greatest care in keeping the precautions of our holy Father. Therefore he tells us positively: *And if you do not observe this in things great and small, however much you may think that you succeed, you will not be able to escape the deceits of the devil in little or in much. Even if your whole error consisted in your not being ruled in all things by obedience, you are evidently wrong.* These words of the saint are worthy of the deepest meditation, especially when we find obedience more difficult and our way of thinking more reasonable. Then it is certain the enemy is trying to make us fall, or at least to deprive us of the merit of obedience. We know he will not tempt us with evil as such, but he will always offer the poison under the appear-

ance of good. With this advice of St. John of the Cross always present in mind, nobody can be deceived.

10. Some passages of our holy Mother St. Teresa of Jesus will fitly close this chapter: *Remember, sisters, that the devil has not forgotten us; he invents honors even in monasteries, and creates laws which ascend and descend in dignities like those of the world. Even if obedience were to order them, some would take offense, and there would be some to defend them, saying it was an affront.* (8) In another place she says: *The greatest care should be taken of the interior feelings; especially if they concern superiority. May our Lord through His passion deliver us from saying or thinking deliberately; I am older, I have more years in the Order, I have worked more, and yet they treat the other better. If such thoughts come, it is necessary to cut them off at once; if they are entertained or talked about, it is a pestilence from which great evils may result. If the Prioress permits such things, however little they may be, let them believe that God has permitted her to be the prioress on account of their sins and it is a beginning of their perdition; let them pray much, that it may be remedied, for they are in great danger. Let us resemble, my daughters, in some way the great humility of the most holy Virgin, whose habit we wear. What a confu-*

(8) Way of Perf. XXXV.

*sion to be called her nuns, for however much we may think to humble ourselves, we fall very short of being daughters of such a Mother, and spouses of such a spouse. If the aforesaid things are not diligently remedied, what today seems nothing, tomorrow will be venial sin. It is so great an evil that, if you are careless in this matter, it will not stop here. It is a very serious thing for any congregation. (9)*

If these prudent counsels of St. Teresa are observed with all exactitude, the spirit of obedience will be well guarded in religious houses; and if obedience is faithfully guarded, it will not be easy for the devil to disturb the peace of the children of God.

(9) Way of Perf. XXXV.

## CHAPTER XI

### FIFTH PRECAUTION, THE SECOND AGAINST THE DEVIL

#### HOW WE SHOULD REGARD OUR SUPERIORS—THEIR DUTIES

1. WORDS OF THE SAINT.—2. IMPORTANCE OF THIS SUBJECT.—3. HUMAN IMPERFECTIONS OF THE SUPERIOR AND LACK OF VIRTUE IN THE INFERIOR.—4. DIGNITIES ARE ALSO TESTS. SOME ARE SO WEAK THAT A LITTLE HONOR MAKES THEM DIZZY.—5. MORE LIBERTY. A GOOD SUPERIOR SEEKS TO HAVE LESS.—6. REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST SUPERIOR OF THE CHURCH.—7. THE BEST SUPERIOR HAS THE MOST GENEROUS HEART. EVERY MAN NEEDS AFFECTION.—8. TWO PRACTICAL EXAMPLES.—9. BEHOLD THE MAN.—10. THE SUPERIOR A FATHER. HE HAS NO RIGHT TO REPEL. HE BLESSES. WE FEEL LOVED.—11. THE GREATEST MORAL FORCE LIES IN THE AFFECTION. HOW DIVINE PROVIDENCE GRANTS IT. HUMAN NATURE IS VERY POOR IN AFFECTION.—12. THE SUPERIOR MUST LOOK AFTER HIS SUBJECTS. REPULSIVE NATURES. PERSONS WHO SEEM TO HAVE NO OTHER MISSION THAN TO ANNOY OTHERS.—13. HOURS OF TEST FOR THE SUPERIOR. VOICE OF CONSCIENCE, AND VOICE OF WOUNDED PRIDE.—14. HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO ATTEND TO CONSCIENCE. GROANINGS OF MOSES.—15. THE UNGRATEFUL AND THE IMPERFECT. WORDS OF EZECHIEL THE PROPHET.—16. THE EXAMPLE OF THE SUPERIOR AND HIS RESPONSIBILITY.—17. CELEBRATED AND TERRIBLE WORDS OF ST. TERESA.—18. POOR SUPERIORS.

1. The second precaution is that you must never look upon your superior, whoever he may



be, with less regard than upon God Himself; because he holds His place. And remember that the devil, the enemy of humility, interferes much in this matter. *The advantages of looking thus upon your superior are great, and the neglecting it will cause you to suffer much loss and many evils. Keep a careful watch over yourself, do not look to the qualities, the manners, the appearance, nor to any habits of your superior. If you do you harm yourself, for you will change your obedience from divine into human, and you will be influenced by what you see in your superior, and not by the invisible God whom you should obey in him. Your obedience will be vain or less fruitful, the more you are troubled by the untowardness of your superior, or the more you rejoice on account of his good qualities. For I tell you that a great many religious in the way of perfection are ruined by not looking on their superiors as they ought; their obedience is worth little in the eyes of God, because influenced by human considerations. If you do not overcome yourself in these things, and be indifferent as to who the superior may be, so far as your personal feelings go, you will never be spiritual, nor will you faithfully keep your vows.*

2. The words of our holy Father in this precaution are so weighty, that they are worthy of the greatest attention of all who glory in being his

children. He commands us *not to look upon the superior, whoever he may be, with less regard than upon God Himself*, and he assures that for not having observed this rule, *the devil has ruined a multitude of religious in the way of perfection*. And he admonishes us that if we do not observe this with all fidelity, we shall not only not become spiritual or perfect, but we shall not be able to keep our vows faithfully. As is evident, this is more than mere advice. There is no question of a matter that we are free to take or leave according to the greater or less devotion of our soul. What is said here is essential to the religious life, for he is not a good religious who does not keep his vows. Our holy Father assures us that those who do not observe this precaution carefully will not keep their vows. This matter deserves then our greatest attention.

It is stated in this precaution that religious have a serious obligation of entirely overlooking the personal qualities of their superiors, and of fixing their mind on God alone, whom the superior represents. This teaching is excellent and necessary, both for the personal sanctification of each individual religious and for the welfare of the whole congregation; no matter what we may do to stimulate ourselves to put it into practice or to inculcate it into others, we shall always fall short of the reality.

3. It is extremely necessary that whenever the superiors remind their subordinates of their

duties, they do not forget their own obligations for they have very great ones. It is unfortunately a sad experience that often the scanty virtue of subordinates is miserably wrecked by what they consider the shortcomings of their superiors. It is clear that no superior would want to be a stumbling block or scandal to any weak souls whom the Lord entrusted to him, precisely because they were weak and in need of his fatherly care. And therefore before commenting on this precaution of our holy Father, in which he tells us, *do not look upon your superior with less regard than upon God Himself*, it seems expedient to remind superiors of their great obligation to watch assiduously, that in the discharge of their duties their shortcomings will influence their subjects as little as possible; for being human, they have their own weaknesses.

Many believe that ordinarily it is useless and even dangerous to tell half-truths. The truth can always be told fully, and will prove useful provided it is told wholly and in the spirit of charity. The whole truth in the present instance is this, subjects may never fix their attention on the personal defects of their superiors. But the superiors on their part have a very great obligation not to try the virtue of their subordinates by their personal defects. The one can not be recommended and the other omitted entirely, therefore let a few simple reflections be made on superiors before commenting on the perfect obedi-

ence their subjects owe them. Let nobody think that what is said is being done in a spirit of criticism or opposition to authority, for it is more than twenty years since the writer has been free from the office of superior in one form or another. Thus these pages will serve in the first place to his greater confusion and as a stimulant to his own deficiency.

4. First of all superiority bestows great honor on those on whom authority has been conferred. Every legitimate superior is invested with lawful power. St. Paul says, all power is from God, and therefore every superior is the vicegerent of God. In the discharge of his office he holds for his subjects the place of God Himself. Hence these words of the holy Gospel are applicable to all legitimate superiors: *He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.*

(1) Those having charge of souls are deputed by Divine Providence for the greatest and most important work in the world, the sanctification and salvation of souls. For this reason St. Paul explains his office as follows: *We are God's coadjutors.* (2) The most exalted dignity and the highest possible honor is to assist God, to co-operate with Him in the government and sanctification of souls. This is the relation of superiors towards inferiors, and for this reason they always

(1) Luk. X. 16.

(2) I Cor. III. 9.



occupy a pre-eminent place among them, "they are worthy of double honor." (3)

But it would be faulty in the superior to consider only his right to honor or pre-eminence. For if authority is an honor, it is also a danger, and this more or less imminent according to the virtue and personal conditions of the superior himself. Authority elevates, but the higher one ascends, the more one is exposed to the eyes of all. While one mingles among the multitude, it is easy to conceal one's imperfections; but if the person is raised ever so little, even the smallest defects will be noticed. Men are very unwilling to honor those who by their defects dishonor the position they occupy. We have often seen those who as individuals in a humble condition were loved and esteemed by all, when raised to some high position were dishonored and despised. Moreover there are some so weak that they can not look from any height without feeling dizzy. Superiority is a great elevation and some persons can not look upon their subordinates without danger to themselves. What trifling vanity turns their weak heads and easily clouds their vision. at the smallest height! There is no touchstone like that of superiority to know the true value of a person.

5. The superior has nobody who will oblige him to observe the law. His chief and only rule

(3) I Tim. V. 17.

of conduct in a multitude of details of daily life is his conscience. He enjoys therefore more liberty, and liberty is the true test of a person's character. Good educators say that the best means of knowing the disposition of children, is to allow them complete liberty on the playground; and to know the real value of a person there is nothing like the office of superior. Great virtue and deep spirituality are necessary to be a superior for many years and not to lead a wasted life. That person is worthy of compassion who avails himself of his office to satisfy the better his caprices. He will surely lose his reputation in the eyes of his subjects.

Everywhere and especially in religious orders, good superiors, far from believing that they are permitted certain liberties on account of their office, consider themselves more restricted than their subjects. These by simply asking the superior's permission render lawful and meritorious the actions which in themselves are indifferent and even doubtful; whereas the mere lawfulness does not suffice for the superior, he needs the tacit and full consent of all his subjects, a thing not easily obtained. Superiors must bear in mind the words of that great model of superiors, St. Paul: *All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient.* (4)

(4) I Cor. VI. 12.

6. Our Lord Jesus Christ personally appointed the first superior of His Church; but before this He examined him three times as to his love: *Lovest thou me? Lovest thou me more than these?* This question put by the Savior to man is simply adorable; for while reading it in the Gospel, one must fall on his knees and adore God, who has so tender a love for His creatures. It is terrible for the man to whom it is addressed; it is not possible to answer it in words when it is well understood. There are feelings in the heart which admit nothing but sobs and tears. St. Peter answered twice boldly saying, yes, but he had not yet understood its full import. The gaze and the word of God created that which the master sought. At the third inquiry his soul was transformed; the work that Jesus intended was accomplished. The first Apostle of Jesus Christ, the first superior of the Church and the model of all the others, could speak no more save in the language of love. He groaned and cried: *Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love thee.*(5) And until the sublime question was answered in this manner, the ineffable precept, *feed my sheep*, was not intimated to Peter.

7. All this signifies that the superior must be a man of large heart. Circumstances and conditions being equal, he is the better superior who can lavish greater affection on all. The rule in

(5) John XXI. 17.

itself is hard, and if he whose duty it is to have it observed does not soften it by his goodness and love, surely he will endanger his own authority and place obstacles in the way of his subjects. Religious persons are especially in need of kind and affectionate treatment. It may seem childish to some, but it is a fact we must take into consideration, if we desire to keep the peace in religious communities. It is necessary to repeat; we suffer from hunger of affection, even when we are convinced that we do not deserve it. No matter how high a man may seem to soar in the mystical life, in some way or other he will manifest child-like, sweet emotions, when he receives certain proofs of sincere affection from the person whom he respects and esteems.

8. The writer made in the first year of his religious life the acquaintance of a certain young priest, who without knowing it, served as a complete study for observation. He had obtained some literary honors but his religious vocation was so weak that when spoken to the first time, he was on the eve of leaving the Order. He did leave it later and died soon after. One day he failed to come to the refectory at the hour of dinner, when the superior, a saintly man, asked the writer to discover the reason of his absence, and in any event to give him all needful attentions. It was enough to see his face to understand that he was greatly disturbed. The message brought him from the superior, however, en-



couraged him. He had it repeated several times and being assured that it was the exact word of his superior, his face was illumined with rays of happiness; he got up at once, came down to the refectory, and ate with a good appetite. A poor man sentenced to death, whom the writer assisted at that terrible hour, told him: *What I feel most is to die without having anybody's affection. There will not be a single person who will shed a tear over my body, or who will erect a cross on my grave.* And when he saw his listener weeping, and heard him promise that he would place a cross over his grave, that man not only ascended the steps of the gallows with resignation, but even beaming with joy.

9. Behold such is man, such is humanity when we understand it thoroughly. There is not a man, however perverse he may seem to be, who would not try to be a good man and even a saint, if he could convince himself that he is still able to receive and to give sweet and pure affection like that he received when he played at his mother's knee.

We religious call our superior Father, and therefore he must have a true father's heart. This is one of the greatest charms of the religious life. It is indeed a great happiness to love and to be loved with such pure affection, and at the same time it is so peaceful, since it is not disturbed by the natural inclination of relationship; and yet it is none the less sweet or intense. This is a treas-

ure peculiar to the religious life. In youth, when the heart and the imagination are still in their pristine freshness, and all is bright and smiling with happiness, it is very easy to cultivate friendship within the limits of a pure and sincere affection, and to believe that this love is natural. But in later years especially in the evening of life, when much labor has so affected our spirit and our heart that it seems we have no right to smile but only to look up to heaven, then it is a blessing to be able to trust with filial confidence a man who has not the right to cast us aside, and who, we know, takes pleasure in receiving us as a father does his son.

10. And because he is our father, we kiss on bended knee his hand or his scapular, on our knees we receive his blessing before retiring for the night, and when going out and coming home; and above all, what religious would like to die without receiving his superior's blessing? If all this were not beautiful and charming, it would be a disgraceful farce; and if we were not sure that the superior really loves us as a father, it would be very difficult to observe these and other points of religious discipline. The bravest general feels happy when he can receive on his knees, the blessing and the caresses of a fond mother. In the same way religious, both the young who still see everything in roseate hues, and the old who are bent under their years, and sorrows, and labors, feel happy when they are loved by their superior.

They look on him with satisfaction when they feel sure that his heart responds to the sweet name of Father by which they address him.

11. But all this so sweet to the subject is most difficult to the superior. What is most valuable is always most difficult to obtain. The greatest moral power of man lies in his heart. A sincere paternal love, so strong that it endures and obliges one to forget and sacrifice himself entirely, is perhaps the greatest moral wonder. This love necessary for the existence of the human family is instilled by God Himself into the hearts of parents, and especially into the heart of the mother. As this love also is necessary for the life of religious orders, God gives it to all superiors; but He wants them to ask for it, and in a certain sense to merit it. Therefore the first superior of the Church had to be examined severely in the matter of his love.

Here lies the greatest difficulty for discharging well the office of superior in a religious house. If superiors could always keep their heart under control, if they could conserve the youthful love of the saints and that affectionate goodness which softens every hardship; then indeed the office of superior would be easy. Youthfulness of heart is often as difficult to preserve as youthfulness of body, and without a very special grace it is impossible. Every man must lament more or less with the Royal Prophet: *My iniquities have overtaken me, and I was not able to see; they have multiplied above the hairs of my head; and my heart hath*

*forsaken me.* (6) It is characteristic of a mother's heart, and that of the great friends of God, that they never cease to love affectionately even under continual sacrifices.

12. There is no superior who does not attend with fatherly solicitude to the subject who approaches him in any real necessity; but this is not enough, the title of father obliges him to do much more. It is necessary to go in search of those who do not come to him; even of those who *avoid* him; and this not for any childish play which would only repel those who, whether right or not, esteem themselves serious men. He must use all lawful means to convince them of his fatherly solicitude and love. This may at times be very difficult, especially towards those who regard him with natural antipathy, or towards those for whom he has the same feeling. These persons on account of their manners, their education, their character, or their particular way of thinking, may naturally irritate the superior whenever they come into his presence. God for the exercise of His servants, certainly permits such persons to live in religious houses. Some souls seem to have as their special mission in this world to lead suffering lives, without themselves knowing why; frequently and unintentionally they mortify others very much. Everything molests them,

(6) Ps. XXXIX. 130.



and they molest everybody else, on account of their dissatisfaction.

It is certain that these poor souls will assume in the presence of their superiors this attitude, so convenient for egotistic hearts, yet so contrary to the spirit of the gospel, so fatal to religious houses, and so discomfiting to persons of a tender conscience. They assiduously observe all the externals of religious discipline and are vigilant that nobody fails in them; isolated from those who do not think as they do, they constitute themselves judges of all things and all persons. No doubt the superior will be the first victim; his real defects will be keenly noted and highly exaggerated, and his best intentions misinterpreted. He will not be hated—hatred cannot thrive in a religious house—but his self-love will be frequently discomfited, and his heart made to bleed.

13. These are the superior's hours of probation; in them he is purified. With his dignity offended and his self-love wounded, he is told to abandon these ingrates until they are converted; that it matters little if the coldness which begins to exist between him and them becomes more intense and grows, until it finally separates them completely; perhaps, too, he may be told to retaliate little by little, paying them back in their own coin. What does his conscience say? See that you are a father and more than a father to them. You must treat them as their mother

would if she were near. A mother never forsakes her children, never seeks retaliation. Human prudence will whisper to wounded self-love, that those persons will take special pleasure in wounding us anew at every attempt we make to approach them. But the charity of Jesus Christ and Christian prudence tell us that these poor souls are passing through a crisis, that they are being tempted and are aware of it; they are prejudiced in mind and bitter in heart. Do not forsake them, do not exasperate them with importune reflections, but avail yourself of every opportunity to enlighten their minds and to sweeten their hearts. With a little love and confidence that you can instil into their souls, they will become good and perhaps better than many others. And while waiting for these good results, pray for them, suffer, and wait patiently for their return.

14. How many sacrifices this imposes on the superior! How clearly it proves that the office of superior is a burden. If men were not so stupid and so ready to overlook what the office of superior imposes on a person, there would not be one willing to accept it, unless bound by the inevitable duty of conscience. Let us agree, it surpasses the ordinary strength of the human heart to love always with an affectionate goodness, to sacrifice one's susceptibilities for those who love us little and who perhaps take pleasure in mortifying us. It is then that the superior feels the need of falling down on his knees before the cru-

cifix or the Tabernacle and of entreating with David: *Lord, have mercy on me. . . . Create a clean heart in me, and renew a right spirit within my bowels. Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit.* (7)

In the life of every superior there are such critical hours when they can find no relief but in humble and fervent prayer. Then they well understand the sobs and groans of Moses, the first superior of the people of God, who, notwithstanding the great solicitude for his people, saw them dissatisfied and murmuring against God and himself. He thought his position insupportable and turned to God with words that indicated the profound bitterness of his soul: *Why hast thou afflicted thy servant? wherefore do I not find favor before thee? and why hast thou laid the weight of all these people upon me? Have I conceived all this multitude, or begotten them, that thou shouldst say to me: Carry them in thy bosom as the nurse is wont to carry the little infant, and bear them into the land, for which thou hast sworn to their fathers.* (8)

15. No superior can excuse himself saying that others are ungrateful, for the reward is to be expected from God alone; neither can he say that

(7) Ps. L. 12, 14. = Ps. L. 12, 14.

(8) Num. XI. 12.

they are not amiable; they are not loved on account of their good qualities, but for the love of God. Nor again can it be a legitimate excuse to say that others are very defective; it is precisely for this reason that superiors are appointed, to correct them in charity, to prevent them from becoming worse, or at least that their defects may not influence others.

Superiors should frequently meditate on this passage from the Prophet Ezekiel: *And the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man . . . Prophecy, and say to the shepherds, Thus saith the Lord God: Woe to the shepherds of Israel, that fed themselves. My flock you did not feed; the weak you have not strengthened, and that which was sick you have not healed; that which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was driven away you have not brought again; but you ruled over them with rigor, and with a high hand. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. I myself shall require my flock at your hands.* (9)

16. Besides the difficulties which the administration of religious communities naturally entails, there is the great responsibility due to the powerful influence which the example of the superior wields over others. Ecclesiasticus tells us that as the ruler of a city is, so also are they that dwell

(9) Ezech. XXXVI. 1.



therein.(10). Perhaps none of the good qualities of the superior will be imitated by the religious, but his bad example will not be without followers. A good superior is a great blessing of God. If the Holy Scripture indicates as a sign of the approaching destruction of nations, that they are governed by youthful princes—*I will give children to be their princes*—(11) we can hold for certain that a religious, and still more a religious congregation, will be ruined when ruled by inapt superiors. Superiors have before God a tremendous responsibility. St. Paul says: *Obey your prelates, and be subject to them. For they watch as being to render an account of your souls.* (12) And the Holy Ghost warns superiors: *A most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule.* (13) For this reason the holy king David prayed earnestly that God would forgive him his sins and the sins of others. (14)

17. Our holy Mother St. Teresa, when speaking of the death of a religious who had conferred many favors upon her, said: *He was a person of profound virtue and the death our Lord gave him was of such great edification that all wondered at his recollection, his spirit of penance, and his humility.* There is question here of a person of

(10) Eccl. X. 2.

(11) Is. III. 4.

(12) Heb. XIII. 17.

(13) Wisd. VI. 6.

(14) Ps. XVII. 14.

great virtue, who had time to prepare himself well for death, who received all the sacraments of the Church and the graces of the Order, and who was assisted by the prayers of his brethren. One would expect that a religious who lived and died so holily went straight to heaven. But our holy Mother did not think so. On the contrary, when she heard of his death she was greatly troubled and began to fear for the salvation of that soul, because that religious had been a superior twenty years: *When I heard that he was dead, I was exceedingly troubled, because I trembled for his salvation, seeing that he had been superior for twenty years. That is what I dread very much; for the care of souls seems to me full of dangers.* (15)

What superior can read this without trembling! But let us see what our holy Mother did for her old superior: *I went to an oratory in great distress, and gave up to him all the good I had ever done in my whole life—it was little enough—and prayed our Lord that His merits might fill up what was wanting, in order that this soul might be delivered from purgatory.* (Ibid.) And then she relates, how after fifteen days, she saw him come out of purgatory and go to heaven in great glory.

18. That religious, a prelate of such exemplary life and who died such an edifying death,

did not come out of purgatory until the saint offered up all the merits of her long and holy life, and asked the Lord to fill up what was wanting for the ransom of that soul. It is not temerity to suppose that the fortunate superior owed in great part his salvation to the prayers of his holy daughter in Christ. And if she feared so much for the salvation of that soul, what safety can we have, whose virtues perhaps would not receive from the holy Mother so complete a eulogy? If that religious with so many virtues had to stay in purgatory fifteen days, how many days shall we have to stay there, we, who perhaps have not a St. Teresa to offer up the merits of her life with those of our Lord Jesus Christ?

The office of superior is fraught with many dangers; it imposes great and continuous sacrifices, and brings with it a tremendous responsibility. It cannot be accepted therefore except under strict obedience, for only in this case are there well-founded reasons, even a certain right to special graces from God. It is then He Who commands us through our superiors to rule over our brethren. In this case, while ruling others the superior obeys no less than those who carry out his orders. Only a fool can take pleasure in a position which the world calls honorable, unless he remembers that in holding it he fulfils a precept of obedience.

That there are some persons incapable of understanding the difficulty of governing others, is

one of the great sacrifices superiors have to offer to God. A sacrifice is always more painful when it is less understood and appreciated by those for whom it is made, but for the same reason it will be more pleasing to God if it is offered up with a pure intention and a resigned heart. Let us keep all this present in mind, and it will surely be easier to observe the precaution of our holy Father, which forms the subject of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE SUBJECT

1. THE SUPERIOR IS THE MESSENGER OF GOD.—2. PROFESSIONAL OBJECT OF RELIGIOUS PERSONS. THERE IS VERY SELDOM OPEN REBELLION.—3. A SECRET REBELLION IS VERY DANGEROUS. DOCTRINE OF ST. THOMAS.—4. MORTAL SIN THROUGH CONTEMPT OR TO FRUSTRATE THE END OF RELIGIOUS LIFE.—5. THE RELIGIOUS STATE THE RADICAL REMEDY FOR MORAL DISEASES OF THE HUMAN HEART.—6. THE ESSENTIALS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.—7. WEAK AND ENIGMATIC PERSONS IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.—8. THEY ARE IN GREAT DANGER OF MORTAL SIN.—9. THEY HAVE A POOR EXCUSE; LAMENTABLE STATE OF CONSCIENCE.—10. WARNINGS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

1. We know from the foregoing precaution that the best and efficacious means against the strategies of our enemy and our own weakness, is a blind and prompt obedience to the will of God manifested by the rule or the will of our superior, who must govern us according to the spirit of the same rule. The superior is nothing more than a servant of the law and of his subordinates, inasmuch as he is obliged in virtue of his office, to point out to them the will of God for their sanctification. The superior is therefore only God's messenger to each of the religious. He who receives an order through a messenger does not pay

as much attention to the messenger as to the person who sent it. In the same way we religious must not consider the person of the superior, but only what he orders because as long as he does not command anything contrary to the spirit of the rule, his order is from God in whose name he commands. Here lies the secret of religious sanctification. And so our Father St. John of the Cross and the others who signed the famous letter on the *regular life* said: *What a religious does by obedience in little things is more pleasing to our Lord than if he performed great virtues and hard things without the sanction of holy obedience.*

2. But this beautiful ideal of perfection is difficult to attain; the life of man however rich in other gifts of nature and grace, is well spent if at the end he reaches this perfect obedience. We religious have chosen as our final goal perfect obedience, together with the other evangelical virtues of poverty and chastity; consequently our conscience and our honor also require that we continually advance until we acquire the perfect submission of our will. But if we cease in our pursuit of this ideal, we may meet with great obstacles and even fall back.

It is not necessary to delay in the study of what is clearly a mortal sin against this virtue. We shall not therefore stop to consider those whose actions are openly refractory and rebellious and grievously sinful before God, because such men

are fortunately rare among the persons consecrated to God. Open rebellion and contumacy in serious matters against obedience are rare, because it is only in cases of the greatest importance that a formal precept of obedience can be imposed; and therefore no religious congregation has any such precepts. It is then very seldom that religious are commanded in this form by the rule or by their superiors; and consequently an open rebellion against a formal precept is almost unknown in a religious house.

3. There is however another rebellion much more dangerous, because it is more subtle and more difficult to recognize. It is not a disobedience that is visible, it is rather an interior antipathy willingly admitted against the spirit of obedience. It is not evidenced by external or violent opposition to authority or to the rule in great matters; this is what causes it to be more subtle and therefore more difficult to discover. Its field is also much wider, for it can extend to all points of the rule and to every action of the superior; this too renders it more dangerous; moreover this subtle rebellion can transform acts light in themselves into occasions for grievous sins.

In such a delicate and important matter the doctrine and the authority of the angelic St. Thomas Aquinas will add much weight to the intrinsic importance of the matter. The Master of the Schools teaches: *Whoever breaking a point of the law despises authority, or makes im-*

*possible the attainment of the object of the law, commits a mortal sin.*

4. Therefore, apart from open rebellion against the rule or command of superiors formally intimated, which happens very rarely in religious life, there are two other ways in which religious persons can commit a mortal sin against the obedience they have promised. In the first the transgression includes contempt of the law or of the superior; and in the second the transgression frustrates the end intended by the legislator.

The end which the Supreme Legislator intended when establishing religious institutions, was none other than perfect charity; that is to love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves; and as contempt is essentially opposed to both of these commandments, it is always a mortal sin. But how can we know whether a fault against obedience implies contempt or not? It imports much to have clear ideas on this matter, inasmuch as there is always mortal sin in a fault that seems insignificant in itself when committed with contempt.

The Angelic Doctor explains this point with his customary clearness. There is contempt of the law or of authority when one disobeys, not through fickleness or inattention, not because the mind is disturbed by some passion of anger or disorderly affection, but *only because obedience is repugnant*



*to the will.* (2) Frequent transgressions of obedience do not imply contempt of the law or authority, and hence there is no right to think that he who frequently sins against obedience in small matters, is in state of mortal sin. But as frequent faults against a virtue predispose a person against it, as the same saint remarks, so there is danger of committing the sin of contempt unconsciously through the frequent repetition of acts against the virtue of obedience.

5. Having clearly laid down the premises, it is very easy to draw the consequences, and each one should apply them to himself. There are persons so unreliable, and their state of conscience is so extravagant, that the mere fact that something is forbidden is the most powerful incentive for them to act, and the fact that it is commanded causes them the greatest difficulty to perform it. This is the surest proof that our nature has been thoroughly infected by the primitive rebellion. The will repels subjection, not because it sees a greater good in acting contrary to what has been commanded, but because it repels all subjection. That the vow of obedience might provide a radical cure for this evil, the religious state was established and founded by our Lord Jesus Christ. Persons outside the religious state will obey because they are forced by necessity, or to gain attention, or because what has been commanded

(2) II. 11, Q. 186.

seems to be reasonable. But we religious have no right to say that what is commanded is reasonable; we have to obey because this is our profession, because we made the sacrifice of our will to God, and God wishes that our life should be a continuous sacrifice and a constant reaction against the rebellion of the human mind. This rebellion is a primitive disease and so deeply rooted in human nature that it leads man to desire, not what is best, but what is more to his taste.

6. "There is no merit in obeying because what is commanded seems to us reasonable," said the Little Flower. And St. Thomas teaches: *By the vow of obedience man contracts the obligation of doing for the love of God what is disagreeable to himself. And so the things he does are more pleasing to God, though in themselves they may be of less value, because man cannot offer to God anything greater than to submit his will to another man for the love of Him.* (3) This is the most essential point in the religious state, and the motive of that simple and childlike obedience, called the evangelical virtue, because it is highly recommended in the Gospel and its perfect model is found in the life of Christ. This virtue is most pleasing to God because it cannot be acquired without the perfect purification of the spirit and without perfect charity. The different practices in religious life have no value without obedience.

(3) II. 11, Q. 186, a 5 ad 5um.

The attainment of this perfect submission of mind and heart to the will of God, is therefore one of the chief aims of the religious life.

7. Perhaps it would not be difficult to find in religious houses persons who are not yet entirely cured of this rebellion of the human heart. It might even be said that years of religious life have rather hardened their will than softened it. They may have no attachment to anything that is or seems to be sinful, but they stubbornly follow their caprices. They have no consciousness of being bad, and for nothing in the world would they break a formal precept of obedience; but they seem to take special delight in certain little transgressions of the rule that are habitual with them; and perhaps they find a secret pleasure in seeing those who represent the rule mortified and contradicted, only because obedience is repugnant to them and they do not want anybody to mingle in their affairs. They know well that their way of acting is the source of much displeasure to the person who has to govern them; and they also know that they are the cause of much disturbance and evil in the community. They are not ignorant that through their behavior they render very difficult, if not impossible, the spirit of confidence, of peace, and of harmony that should prevail in the monastery among the religious themselves and that should regulate all their relations with the superior. This triple spirit of perfect charity and perfect obedience is the object the Supreme Legis-



lator had in view when founding the religious state. And if these souls with their stubborn spirit either prevent or render more difficult the attainment of this noble end, how can they enjoy peace of conscience? Or is there perhaps at the bottom of their souls a subtle spirit of rebellion which unconsciously makes them fall into the grievous sin of contempt of the law and of authority?

8. This inclination of easily violating the rule or the orders of superiors, has it not perhaps contracted in them a certain habit of disgust in regard to obedience? And if St. Thomas says that those who despise the law or the authority of superiors, or make the attainment of the object of the religious life impossible, commit mortal sin, it is evident that those who with such facility and as if by habit fail against holy obedience are in the greatest danger of lapsing into mortal sin.

Superiors, as was said in the previous chapter, are in serious danger of offending God gravely; but neither are the subjects free from this danger. Their only safety lies in humble and simple submission to the rules of their congregation. However, there are not many who scorn the authority of the rule. It is possible and even easy, but it is not common even among those who more or less frequently disobey the orders of their superior. The reason is this: although pride is the chief cause of our sins of disobedience, nevertheless there is almost always some other cause



present that lessens the responsibility of our actions.

9. One of the causes that attenuate the malice of our disobedience is to be found in the personal qualities of the superior. Very often the defects noticed in the superior provoke the selfishness of the subject, and there is no person who is altogether free from selfishness or sensitiveness. Human frailty will find in the supposed defects of the superior a reason which dispenses from obeying promptly and cordially his least indications. In this instance the disobedience, without formal contempt, will not ordinarily be contempt of authority, but rather a dislike of the person in whom the authority is vested.

“I would be very obedient if my superiors were what they should be. I would never offer the least resistance to their commands, if I was sure that they were dictated by a spirit of rectitude and prudence. But it is extremely difficult for me to obey those promptly and blindly who are destitute of the virtue and talent necessary for the position they occupy.” This is the state of mind in nearly all those who more or less habitually transgress holy obedience; scarcely ever do they think that their lack of submission to superiors is due to contempt of the law of the superior. They do not think that their will refuses to obey, for they know that it would then be formal contempt of authority and consequently a mortal sin against the fundamental virtue of re-

ligious life. But this excuse will never be a recommendation of their virtue, because it indicates a lamentable state of conscience, and imminent danger of losing entirely their religious vocation.

10. Our Divine Redeemer established the religious state to be the basis of the evangelical counsels, when teaching those counsels in His first sermon to the multitude the Master said: *I tell you, that unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* (4) *For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens this? Be ye therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.* (5) *For not every one that saith to me Lord Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.* (6)

These words of our Lord should induce us to make some very serious reflections, for we have left the world and entered religion with the explicit intention of observing the counsels. For this purpose God and the Church have enriched the religious life with so many graces and privileges. Only those who fulfil the will of God shall be saved.

But the spirit of submission to the divine will must be greater in religious persons than among

(4) Matt. V. 20.

(5) Matt. V. 46, 47.

(6) Matt. VII. 21.

Christians in general, and also greater than among priests themselves. If we obey exteriorly without the interior submission we have no right to any reward, for God does not want external actions but our will. Slaves are very obedient exteriorly, and even the devils obey God. If in our obedience we submit our will only when the command or the person who commands is pleasing to us, then we shall have no reward, for even those who are not Christians do this. If our justice or our spirit of submission is not greater than that of the rest of mankind, we shall fare very badly on the great day of final reckoning.

Our holy Mother St. Teresa says: *The Lord said to me once that I was not obedient if I was not determined to suffer.* (7) Therefore the obedience that does not carry with it some sacrifice is of little value. The pretext of failing in obedience because we do not like the superior, is a very poor excuse. This precaution of our holy Father St. John of the Cross is directly opposed to those who thus pretend to excuse themselves. He tells them that persons who regulate their obedience by the personal qualities of the superior are totally ruined in religious perfection. *And your obedience will be vain, or the more imperfect, the more you are grieved by the bad qualities of the superior, or rejoice at his good qualities.*

(7) Life XXXVI.

This saying is very hard; and what is worse, we expose ourselves to lose all the merit of our obedience even when we think we are very obedient; for moral actions derive their merit not precisely from their quality, but from the motive or intention with which they are performed. The same holy Father adds: *If you do not overcome yourself in this, and be indifferent as to who your superior may be, so far as your private feelings are concerned, you will never be spiritual, nor will you keep your vows faithfully.*

We shall study in the next chapter how this advice of St. John of the Cross can be carried out.



## CHAPTER XIII

### RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE

1. TO LOOK TO THE QUALITIES OF THE SUPERIORS IS TO LOSE ALL THE MERIT OF OBEDIENCE.—2. IT IS EASY TO FORM JUDGMENTS AND HAVE UNFAVORABLE CONVERSATIONS AGAINST THE SUPERIOR.—3. THE MOST DELICATE FLOWER OF CHARITY. DEPTH OF HUMAN PRIDE.—4. FIRST MURMURING AND REBELLION IN THE WORLD. ITS CONSEQUENCES.—5. SCANDAL IN RELIGIOUS HOUSES.—6. SUPERIORS ARE NOT INFALLIBLE. WE MUST BE GUIDED BY REASON, BUT REASON ITSELF TELLS US TO OBEY WITH SIMPLE SUBMISSION.—7. THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE SUPERIOR. IDEALS AND PRACTICE.—8. A SPIDER'S COBWEB FOR MANY SOULS. AN OPPORTUNE OBSERVATION OF GREAT VALUE. 9. THE TALE-BEARER AND THE GOOD ANGEL OF THE SUPERIOR.—10. AN OBSERVATION IS NOT AN IMPOSITION.—11. GENUINE RELIGIOUS SPIRIT. OUR RULE.—12. EXAMPLE OF THE SAINTS AND OF JESUS.—13. JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST, A PERFECT MODEL OF OBEDIENCE. OBEY, SUFFER, AND BE SILENT.

1. Studying the superior's qualities thereby to regulate our actions, exposes us to the danger of rendering our obedience void of all personal merit. We have already laid down the principle so well known to all who have read anything about asceticism, namely: the Lord rewards our actions, not on account of their intrinsic value, but for the intention and spirit with which we perform them. Therefore our Divine Re-

deemer says: *Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven. . . . But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth, that they alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.....And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, annoint thy head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee. (1) And he that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive the reward of a prophet; and he that receiveth a just man in the name of a just man, shall receive the reward of a just man. And whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. (2)*

Therefore, he who obeys only on account of the good qualities of the superior, renders his obedience useless for he changes it from divine into human, as our holy Father says. His only reward

(1) Mat. VI. 1-18.

(2) Mat. X. 40-42.

will be the pleasure he has taken in pleasing a man. When he goes to receive the final reward of a laborious life he will hear: "Thou hast received thy reward; thou hast obeyed thy superior for his good qualities, and hast not taken care of obeying God in him. Thy reward therefore must be paid by men and not by God, and thou hast received it."

2. It is evil enough to lose the merit of obedience for having paid attention to the good qualities of the superior; but it would be far worse if we tried to find in him qualities that displease us. And indeed we shall inevitably find them if we look more or less curiously into his manner of acting; because it is very difficult for a man to appear perfect before those with whom he comes in daily contact. Then there naturally arise unfavorable judgments against the superior, with all the inconveniences of rash judgments against the neighbor that were mentioned while commenting on the third precaution against the world. But here the consequences are much more far-reaching, for the unfavorable judgments are against one who represents God Himself for us. Above all, the sins of the tongue are most dangerous in this case. It is impossible not to speak, and not to speak unfavorably of a superior about whom frequent rash judgments are entertained; then there is besides the great and inevitable danger of scandalizing those who hear our uncharitable and irreverent conversation.

Let us note here a fact which, however strange it may seem to be and however disgraceful to admit, is nevertheless all too common, and each can observe it in himself, because scarcely any one will be found who willingly or unwillingly has not experienced it deep in his soul. We allude to that special pleasure felt in thinking unfavorably and perhaps even in murmuring a little about persons who are in any way superior to us, whether because they are invested with authority to command, or because they enjoy a better social position; because they have better qualities of virtue or greater talents; or simply because they receive from others more attention than we do. It is certain that to ponder over and perhaps to ridicule the defects of prominent persons, is the delight of indelicate characters. Who has not at some time or other been guilty on this point? This is due to the fact that our pride naturally feels humiliated before persons who are superior to us; and hence that intimate and secret pleasure which the poor human heart feels, when it observes and can expose some of the defects which tend to diminish to a certain extent the good qualities that they possess and which wound our pride.

When we have a great esteem and an affection for these people, we feel their faults as if they were our own and perhaps even more; but when this is wanting, and especially if our self-love is wounded by some of their qual-



ities, then to reveal their defects and to ponder on them gives us pleasure. This is sad, indeed, but alas such is the poor human heart; and to acknowledge its weakness is the best way to correct it. Religious life is not entirely exempt from this weakness. If one does not watch his heart most carefully about feelings of disaffection towards the superior, he may fall even unconsciously into lamentable disorders.

3. We have seen that the aim of the religious life is to attain the spirit of prompt and simple submission to the will of God, as manifested to us by the rule or by the will of the superior. For this virtue which is the most delicate flower of charity and which induces God to take His delight in the soul that possesses it, can be destroyed by a single murmur against the superior who on every occasion makes known to us the will of God. No poison infiltrated into the blood can react more efficaciously than murmuring against the superior does, which is launched on a soul that lived peacefully and happily confiding in and submissive to the superior. Murmuring awakens only too quickly the spirit of pride and secret rebellion which we all have lurking in the innermost recess of our heart. It was in this manner the devil tempted Eve. Our first parents were most happy in their simple obedience to God; to ruin them the enemy had only to murmur a little against God, to make them believe that the Lord had imposed His command upon them, because He

was jealous lest they become like to Himself knowing good and evil. He has forbidden you, said the crafty serpent, because: *God doth know that in what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened; and you shall be as God's, knowing good and evil.* (3)

4. Thus through fatal and calumnious murmuring against God, the first and most disastrous disobedience came into the world. It is certain that nearly all the sins which have followed and will follow till the end of time, have as their proximate cause some internal or external murmur against the person of a superior. Excepting cases of formal contempt which are not frequent among good people, whenever the dispositions of authority are violated, it is because the person who represents the same is considered wanting in rectitude or ability. And therefore to observe or to call other people's attention to the lack of proper qualities in the superior, is to poison souls, to render difficult, if not impossible, the principal aim of the religious life. It is, in a word, to incur the sin of scandal against which our Lord was so inexorable. He says it is impossible that there be no scandal, but He adds: *Woe to him through whom it comes. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea, than that he should scandalize one of these little ones.* (4)

(3) Gen. III. 5.

(4) Luk. XVII. 1, 2.

5. Murmuring causes in society the same havoc through the corruption of morals, that it effects in the cloister to religious perfection. What a tremendous responsibility for him who causes any scandal in religious communities. The end of religious life is a spirit of simple submission founded on charity. To cause some souls to lose this excellent good, would be an enormous evil; and the gravity of this sin is in proportion to the damage it entails. There is no doubt that he who is accustomed to observe the defects of superiors will give scandal in this matter. Therefore our holy Father says, that to fix our attention on the defects of superiors will cause the total ruin of religious perfection and will prevent the religious from keeping their vows. He, on the contrary, who pays no attention to the person who commands but only to what is commanded, will be free from this evil, for he knows that the superior takes the place of God and that is enough for him.

6. An objection might here be raised and it seems the importance of the matter calls for an answer. All would be well if the superiors were angels instead of men. Then we could carry out their commands blindly, as we would be sure that nothing has been commanded but what is right. Our superiors may be mistaken and the virtue of obedience cannot oblige us even when what is commanded is mere nonsense. Let us consider this objection.

Our holy Father prescribes blind obedience in this precaution, but he does not ask us to renounce our reason, even when we obey. Here are his own words: *Take counsel of your reason and see what it tells you concerning the ways of God; this will profit you more before God than all the works done without this attention, and more than all the spiritual consolations which you crave. Blessed is he who, leaving aside his taste and inclination, looks on things conformably to reason and justice and puts them into practice.* The same right reason tells us that we must obey the superior whenever it is not evident that he is commanding us something that is important against justice. If at any time he should command something evidently grave against the natural law, against the law of God or of the Church, it is clear that it would not be reasonable to obey. But there must be evidence of error on the part of the superior and of the gravity of the matter. The fact that we think the superior's orders are not prudent, or that it would be better to execute them in a different way, will never dispense with the obligation of accepting them sincerely. The contrary would make the religious as well as social life impossible; and authority would become a ridiculous figure.

7. The superior has to consider things from a very high vantage point, for he has to look to the welfare of all and to see that the spirit of the rule is observed. For acting in one way rather



than in another, he has his reasons of which the subjects are not aware, and he has to attend to circumstances which perhaps others have not noticed. To conceive an idea, to explain it, to devote one's mind to it, and to attend that others also understand and esteem it, is comparatively easy in a class-room or a club. But to realize it, to make it possible and useful, is not so easy. It is not enough to understand well what is the ideal good or even what is perfect and beautiful. It is necessary to know *hic et nunc*—here and now—as the scholastics used to put it, that is, after considering all the circumstances what is better and useful. Whoever would pretend to do always what is ideally most perfect, would certainly end doing nothing practical. Therefore the saying the best is the enemy of the good. St. Francis de Sales said with much wit and saintly malice: There are men who, by dint of persistence in living like angels, forget to conduct themselves as men.

Men are generally very complex, and therefore he who has to govern them must take many things into consideration of which others have not the least idea. Reason in accordance with our conscience tells us, that if we do not wish to lose ourselves in useless and dangerous cavilling, we must accept with submission whatever orders may be given and by any superior whatever, when it is not evident that they are against the law of God or of the Church.

8. Moreover, in the daily life of a religious, there are a multitude of things which in themselves are indifferent and can be disposed of in a thousand various ways without any detriment to the religious spirit. These small matters of everyday life are often the cobwebs that entangle some persons and render their lives miserable and that of those who come in contact with them. The gift of a good ruler consists in keeping his subjects from getting entangled in these small matters of daily life. But it is impossible for the superior to foresee all the little occasions of annoyance among his subjects; in fact, such petty offenses have often no other origin than the special psychology of some and the refined sensitiveness of others. It is to be supposed that no superior takes special interest in provoking those whom he can content within the limits of the law. Occasionally it may be expedient to test some one in particular the better to sanctify him. But it would be the greatest madness to take such a course for a general rule.

It may happen to any superior however prudent, that some of his dispositions are not received in the proper spirit, simply because some little circumstance which smarts the sensibility of some one has been forgotten. In this case a blind obedience with the decided effort to overcome one's feelings is surely the most perfect course. But an opportune observation to the superior by the same interested person or by another with respect and good will, may often be more pleasing

to God and more beneficial to a religious house, than a costly obedience. To do this properly means sacrifice and supposes much charity.

9. The spirit of going to the superior and relating to him all that happens in the house is mean and detestable. But superiors are not angels. They mortify sometimes without knowing it, and above all without knowing why. To entertain any resentment however small, and above all to carry it from heart to heart, and from tongue to tongue, is vile and moreover very dangerous. Whoever feels any little resentment must try to overcome it completely by sincere acts of obedience and love of God. A religious who approaches his superior in such circumstances and makes him an opportune, prudent, and humble observation does an immense good. Such a person is like an angel placed by God at the side of a superior, religious or secular; but these good angels do not abound on earth as much as is desirable. An observation of this kind can relieve many a tenseness, restore peace to many souls, and avoid very great evils.

10. But it must be understood that an observation is not an admonition, much less an imposition; he who makes it in the proper manner has a right to a grateful acknowledgment, but he should not pretend that his charitable observation be taken into consideration. That observation is only one reason why the superior should act; but he may have other reasons not to take this one into consideration. To pretend the contrary would



mean that the subject imposes his own criterion; that he is supplanting the judgment of the superior by his own; this is always ruinous to authority. We must remember that the superior may have many reasons unknown to us to sustain his point of view, and granted it were right for him to tell all the reasons he has for acting, he would surely satisfy even the most difficult among his subjects. Knowing then that the superior has all the information that can be given him, the inferior has nothing more to do but to fulfil exactly the order given.

11. Apart from the unlikely case when something evidently sinful has been commanded, or from the occasions on which we prudently judge an observation to be beneficial, we should not even think whether what has been commanded is expedient or not, and we must expel every insinuation the enemy may suggest concerning the ability or rectitude of the person who holds God's place for us. This is the genuine religious spirit. This is the spirit and also the letter of our rule, when it states: *That you may not be judged for contempt, but may merit rather eternal life in reward for your obedience.* And the same thing our holy Father tells us in this precaution: *To look thus on your superior will bring you great gain and profit, and the neglect great loss and ruin.*

We have fully explained these evils, though much more could be said. In conclusion, let us summarize briefly what has been stated. As often



as we pay attention to the qualities of our superior to regulate our obedience by them, we approach our enemy, the devil, who can harm us at pleasure; we lose the merit of our obedience; we expose ourselves to certain danger which will entail great evils for ourselves and others; and we deviate from the positive precepts of our rule and of our holy Fathers and from their spirit.

12. The life and example of the saints should act as a stimulus for us, for there never was one who was not obedient; and above all the saint of saints, our Divine Redeemer, Whose life here on earth was the most perfect model of obedience. He Himself tells us that His mission in this world was to do the will of His father. He obeyed not only His father but also His own creatures. He who with one hand sustains the world and on whom all creatures depend, wished as man to depend in all things on a most delicate Virgin and a poor artisan. All that He did in His adorable infancy and youth, the holy Gospel comprises in a few words, and considering that they are applied to the Son of God, they are most ineffable: *And he was subject to them.* (5) He was subject to Mary and Joseph. He passed eighteen years obeying them, and when He gave Himself up into the hands of the executioners, He protested that He did so to fulfill the will of His heavenly Father. *Not as I will, but as thou wilt,* He said to His eternal

(5) Luke II. 51.

Father, while accepting His bitter passion and death in the Garden of Olives.

13. But the most admirable example of obedience is given by our dear Lord is in His Eucharistic life. Through the holy Mass or through holy Communion the religious is brought into daily contact with the adorable Heart of the Savior. It is not an image of Jesus which is always present in the Tabernacle or in our breast after holy Communion, it is He Himself personally, the self same who was subject to Mary and Joseph, who in Judea caressed the children, healed the sick and raised the dead; the same who said to all: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.* (6) On the day of our religious profession we promised to follow Him. Our principal cross is continuous obedience; Jesus said to us: *I have given you an example, that as I have done, so you do also.* (7) Jesus obeyed always. Perhaps our weakness may object, that although He was the Son of God, He could have some pleasure in obeying Mary, a mere creature, it is true, yet nevertheless most pure and Immaculate; and also in obeying St. Joseph, because he was a man according to the heart of God. But Jesus obeyed with pleasure not only Mary and Joseph, but He continues

(6) Luke IX. 23.

(7) John XIII. 15.

to obey in the Tabernacle all priests, good and bad, worthy and unworthy.

A few minutes of sincere prayer before the Most Holy Sacrament ought to cure radically any temptation against obedience. If at any time it should become difficult on account of the qualities of our Superior, let us go before the Tabernacle whence Jesus will speak to our soul: My child, do not complain, do not be uneasy. Learn of me the life of absolute subjection, of silence, of abnegation. Do the character and the manners of your Superior displease you, my poor child? Do you think that all those who handle me in my Eucharistic life are pleasing to me? What would become of the world if in this Sacrament I obeyed good priests only? How few souls would enjoy my presence if they were allowed to take me only to wholly pure souls? Neither you, my friends, who promised to follow me and who so many times protested that you love me, are willing to do anything for me, when I do so much for you and for all in the Eucharist. Rise, faint-hearted man; do not drag your cross which will secure a reward exceedingly great. What I am doing here in my Eucharistic life for you, do you also for love of me. Obey, suffer, be silent according to the example I am giving you in the Eucharist.

Here in the Tabernacle is the most perfect ideal of the religious life. The Eucharistic life of our Divine Redeemer is a life of perfect obedience, of retirement, of silence, and of sacrifice. Happy

the soul who frequently, and especially in critical moments, comes to this august school to learn the lesson of fortitude. With the grace of God and perseverance his obedience will be like that of our Lord in this Sacrament. Then all the austerities of religious life will seem easy. You will be free from the deceits of the enemy, and by the most common exercises of the religious life you will merit a most exalted glory in heaven.



## CHAPTER XIV

### SIXTH PRECAUTION AND THE THIRD AGAINST THE DEVIL—HUMILITY

1. WORDS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—2. WHAT IS BEST KNOWN IS GENERALLY PRACTISED WORST. FALSE CONCEPTION OF HUMILITY.—3. FOR ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS HUMILITY IS THE DAUGHTER OF LOVE AND LIGHT; FOR ST. TERESA IT IS OF TRUTH. NOTABLE PASSAGE OF ST. JOHN.—4. LOVE NEVER SAYS ENOUGH.—5. A LEARNED AND PURE PERSON THINKS HIS WORKS UNWORTHY OF SUCH A GREAT LORD. THIS IS THE FOUNDATION OF TRUE HUMILITY.—6. WORDS OF ST. TERESA; HUMILITY IS TRUTH. A ROOM WHERE MUCH LIGHT ENTERS. THERE IS NO HUMILITY WITHOUT MUCH LIGHT.—7. NOT ALL IS BAD IN US. HUMILITY DOES NOT DISAVOW OUR OWN PERFECTIONS. WORDS OF ST. TERESA. HUMILITY TAKES A MAN AS HE IS.—8. OUR HOLY FATHER AND OUR HOLY MOTHER IN PERFECT HARMONY. THEY ARE THE GREAT MASTERS OF HUMILITY.—9. ST. TERESA MUST BE UNDERSTOOD. ERROR IS THE MASK OF TRUTH, WHAT IT IS TO WALK IN TRUTH. TO KNOW HOW TO USE THE GIFTS OF GOD.—10. SELF-LOVE EXAGGERATES OUR GOOD QUALITIES AND LESSENS OUR DEFECTS. EACH VIRTUE CARRIES WITH IT A RESPONSIBILITY.—11. EVERYTHING FOR THE GOOD OF ALL. NOTHING TO WOUND ANYONE.—12. VANITY SUPPOSES SOME DEFECT IN THE MIND OR IN THE HEART.—13. TO THE VAIN THE LORD DENIES A MULTITUDE OF GIFTS FOR THEIR OWN GOOD.

1. *The third precaution directed against the devil is: You must try to humble yourself always and with all your heart in thoughts, words, and*

*deeds, taking more pleasure in another's welfare than in your own, wishing him to be preferred to you in all things, and this with a sincere heart. In this way you will convert the evil into good, you will cast the devil far from you and you will possess joy in your heart. Try to exercise this more towards those who are less agreeable to you. Know that, if you do not practise this, you will never attain to true charity, nor make progress in it. Be always more willing to receive instruction from any one, than to give it to the least of your brethren.*

2. It seems at first sight that this precaution does not require any commentary, inasmuch as its text is plain enough, and the subject of it is a virtue well known, not only to religious persons, but also to any one conversant with religious treatises. Moreover, so much and so well has been written on humility and on the opposite vice, that it would be ridiculous to pretend to write something that has not already been said or written by the great masters. Notwithstanding this, it may be quite expedient to insist on the matter of this precaution without explaining it; for very often what is best known is least understood, and consequently less attended to.

And this is what happens with humility. In our ascetic and pious books there is no word more frequently used; but it is not rash to say that there is no other word less understood by the greater part of those who pronounce the same.

For many pious persons and even for many of those who are charged with education, humility is nothing else than a constant effort to suppress all thoughts and words that are favorable to us, no matter how much they are at variance with the reality. If we have succeeded in something, however well it was done, we believe we must think and say that we have done it very badly. Though we may have some good qualities or some talent—there is nobody who has none—we must think and say that we have no virtue or talent. As it is far easier to think abjectly than to feel so, we have contracted the habit of frequently using the word humility and of forgetting its genuine meaning. Hence the word which should express the virtue so dear to our Lord Jesus Christ, and which is characteristic of all really great persons, has become for many people nothing more than a mean hypocrisy, repugnant to correct and sincere men.

As they understand humility, so they believe that they must impose it upon others. We know a good man but a bad educator, who censured severely and even unjustly a certain literary work of one of his subordinates, which work according to public opinion was well done. This man, after having mortified his disciple, believing that he had accomplished a duty of his conscience, said: Young people must be treated thus that they may preserve the spirit of humility. It is true that some isolated passages in the lives of the saints



will favor this poor and mistaken idea of humility, as well as this disastrous method of inculcating it. But it is most certain that genuine humility has nothing to do with the formalism of cowardly men, nor have the saints ever understood it so; surely the two great Doctors of Carmel have not. -

3. According to our holy Father, humility is the first born child of love and light; according to our holy Mother it is of truth. It is plain that the teaching of both in this matter, as well as in others, is identical. Here are the two principal passages in which these great saints and masters explain the origin and the nature of humility. Our holy Father, speaking of a person who has reached the third degree of love of God, says: *On this step the soul looks on great things as little, on many as few, its long service as short, by reason of the fire of love which is burning. Here the soul, because of the great love it has for God, is in great pain on account of the scantiness of its service; if it could lawfully die for Him a thousand times it would be comforted. It looks upon itself, therefore, as unprofitable in all it does and on its life as worthless. Another most wonderful effect is that it looks upon itself as being in truth the very worst of all, because its love continues to show it what is due to God; and then, because it labors much in the service of God and sees how faulty and imperfect are its works, it is ashamed and distressed, seeing that the service it renders to God,*



*who is so high, is so exceedingly mean. On this third step the soul is very far from giving way to vain glory or presumption, or from condemning others. These anxious effects and many others of the same kind are wrought in the soul by this third degree of love.* (1) From this beautiful passage of the Mystical Doctor and with nearly the same words we can formulate these two principles: 1. On account of the great love with which the soul is burning, it looks upon itself as unprofitable in all it does. 2. As love continues to show it what is due to God it recognizes all its works to be very unworthy of so great a Lord.

4. To every soul that has been touched by the flame of divine love, whatever it does for God seems little, and so it considers itself much indebted to God. This is a very natural effect of perfect love, for what true lover has been satisfied until he has given his very life for the object of his love? *Nobody can love, nor even understand what love is, if he is incapable of comprehending that it is happiness and pleasure for the lover to die for the object of his love.* This has been said by a Christian philosopher, and this is understood by every person gifted with a noble heart and capable of thought. All the world knows this proverb so common and so profound: Love never *says enough*. It will say less when its object is God, for God is the only adequate object of our love.

(1) II Dark Night XIX.

5. It is also clear that the more a man loves God, the better he knows Him; and that the more he knows God, the better he will understand what infinite sanctity, eternal power, immense goodness, and inexhaustible mercy require from creatures. Then turning his eyes on himself and on his works, he finds them very poor even those that to others seem very good, and perhaps they are so in themselves; but to him who regards them not as they are in themselves but in contrast with God, they seem very deficient and very unworthy of such a great Lord. From this perfect love and from this clear knowledge of God spring feelings of self-contempt before God; such a person has no esteem for himself and for his works. He lives dissatisfied with himself, because he sees that he cannot do for God what his love requires of him and he cannot be satisfied with his works, however many and great they may be, because he knows well how little they are worth in comparison with God's infinite majesty and his obligations to Him.

These noble sentiments create in the soul a true and genuine humility. To understand this well and to feel it, to be absolutely convinced of it, and to live in accordance with this conviction is to be truly humble of heart and of mind, is to understand that humility is to live a humble life. To understand anything else when there is question of humility, is to use a word without knowing its

meaning, is to ridicule it, is to deceive one's self and others.

Humility then according to our Father St. John of the Cross, is the child of divine love, of that holy love which, when it reaches a certain degree, cannot be satisfied with the little man is able to do for God. It is a child of light, of that light which permits us to have a glimpse of what He is and what we are, to some extent of what He is worthy, of how much we owe Him, and of how little we do for Him.

6. The teaching of our holy Mother St. Teresa of Jesus is not different from this doctrine. In the matter of humility she agrees perfectly with her disciple and master, St. John of the Cross. Her teaching is perhaps not so deep and methodical, for she explains it in her own inimitable and charming way, where she has no rival. Here are her own words: *Once I was considering why our Lord was so fond of this virtue of humility, and this was suddenly placed before me without any consideration. It is because God is the highest truth, and humility is walking in truth. It is a great truth to know that we have no good of ourselves, only misery and nothingness; he who does not understand this, is in the wrong way. He who understands it best, pleases infinite Truth most, because he walks in the way of truth.* (2)

Before commenting on this passage, let us consider another, not so well known but not less beautiful—the one complements the other. Speaking of the soul that has reached a certain degree of prayer, our holy Mother says: *The soul looks upon itself as most unworthy, for in a room into which the sunlight enters strongly, not a cobweb can be hid; it sees its own misery. Self conceit is so far away that it seems as if it never could have had any, for now it beholds how very little it could do. . . . It sees that it has deserved hell, and its punishment is bliss.* (3) There was no cowardice or hypocrisy in the ascetic St. Teresa of Jesus. She merely wants humility to have for its basis a well-founded truth. According to this great saint, for a soul to be really humble, it is necessary that much light enter into it; the more light the better, for then those deep and mysterious recesses of our soul will be well known; all the folds of the heart will be discovered; and we shall surely find many reasons to feel ourselves profoundly humbled before God and before our own selves. We are full of defects. This we know, we admit it; but as we say it through mere routine, our ideas are neither very clear nor very fixed. And therefore this conviction helps little to form our practical conscience, and exercises but little influence in the direction of our daily life.

(3) Life XIX.



It is certain that the clearer our understanding is and the more fixed and penetrating our look towards the center of our soul, the greater and the more various will be the imperfections we shall notice in ourselves. We have many; and to find them out it is enough to enter the light and look; for according to this beautiful phrase of St. Teresa, *in a room into which the sunlight enters strongly, not a cobweb can be hid.* And we may be very sure that the deeper we go into our self-knowledge with a corresponding assistance of grace and of faith we shall be able to help ourselves, and consequently our humility will be founded on more solid reasons.

7. But not all in us is bad. Let us examine ourselves attentively and we shall find good qualities of nature and of grace. True humility does not ask us to ignore them. In this point also the teaching of St. Teresa is admirable: *Let him regard certain kinds of humility which exist, and of which I mean to speak. Some think it humility not to believe that God is bestowing His gifts upon them. Let us clearly understand this, and that it is perfectly clear God bestows His gifts without any merit whatever on our part; and let us be grateful to His Majesty for them; for if we do not recognize the gifts received at His hands, we shall never be moved to love Him. It is a most certain truth, that the richer we see ourselves to be, confessing at the same time our poverty, the greater will be our progress, and the more real our humil-*

*ity. It is a most evident truth, that our love for a person is greater, the more distinctly we remember the good he has done us. . . . Here then is a precious pearl which, when we remember that it is given us, and we have it in our possession, powerfully invites us to love. All this is the fruit of prayer founded on humility.... We must renew our strength to serve Him, and strive not to be ungrateful, because it is on this condition that our Lord dispenses His treasures; for if we do not make good use of them, and of the high state to which He raises us, He will return and take them from us and we shall be poorer than ever. His majesty will give the pearls to him who shall bring them forth and employ them usefully for himself and others. (4)*

According to this admirable teaching true humility does not disavow anything that is in us, whether good or evil. It takes us as we are. It requires only light, much light, to know ourselves, and a great sincerity to esteem ourselves accordingly. The more we know ourselves, the more solid and profound will be our humility. Our sight, assisted by optical instruments, can discover many microbes in a glass of water which seemed to be very clear; in a point of the sky apparently free and solitary, we shall see thousands of stars of great magnitude and beauty. The same happens to our heart and mind; we have many

and great defects, but we are not without some good qualities. The humility that commands us to study and find out our deficiencies, does not forbid us to recognize and appreciate our good qualities in their just estimation. Humility does not demand us to ignore nor even to belittle our good qualities of whatever order they may be, physical or moral, natural or supernatural. What genuine humility does demand is that we should understand them well, that we should know how to esteem them at their just value, that we should recognize the true Author from whom we receive them, and the obligations they impose on us; and finally that we should remember that whatever our perfections or good qualities may be, we hold these treasures in earthen vessels which can be broken by the least carelessness; and that we walk on very dangerous roads where at any moment we may be attacked and despoiled of all our treasures. All this was expressed by our holy Mother in these apparently simple, but most profound, words: *Humility is walking in truth.*

8. It is evident that the holy Doctor of Avila considered humility as the legitimate daughter of truth, just as the holy Hermit of Duruelo considered humility the genuine daughter of love. But St. John of the Cross practically says the same as St. Teresa. Because love, whose first fruit is profound humility of soul is, as he tells us, love of God, which when it becomes perfect, illumines the mind and purifies the heart of man,

that he may understand well what God is and what man is, what God has done for us, and what we in turn owe Him. Both of these saints therefore agree in considering humility as an effect, which naturally produces in the mind and heart of man the perfect knowledge of God and of man, and of their mutual relations. It is not known whether anybody surpassed or even equaled our two holy Reformers in writing anything so profound and exact, and at the same time so beautiful and well adapted to render this virtue dear to our good Lord and the saints and amiable to every righteous man. *Humility is walking in truth.* These words contain all that can be said of humility. It suffices to understand well this admirable definition.

9. But it is necessary to understand it well, for a misunderstanding in this important matter would be very detrimental to many souls. There is nothing more pernicious than an excellent definition badly understood or a great truth only partly known. There is no danger in an error that contains no truth, but it becomes very dangerous when it retains a partial truth. Absolute falsehood does not exist, and if it were possible and could present itself as such, it could cause no harm, for every mind would reject it at once. Every error is a mask of some truth; and it is accepted only when it is mistaken for some truth. It is of course the more dangerous the more important the truth which it tries to resemble.



That humility is truth is a most beautiful thought, which puts to flight the false humility of ignorant people, the fears of the cowardly, and all the deceits of the insincere. But this excellent principle of the Doctor of Avila should not be taken as their motto by light minds, whose one desire is to satisfy their ostentation and vanity. Those persons so vain and so void of virtue and even of common sense, those who are so anxious to win the admiration of others for every little gift God has granted them, they certainly cannot cite in their favor the authority of St. Teresa. There is nothing more repugnant to the simple and upright spirit of our holy Mother than this stupid presumption, so common even among persons considered religious.

If any one really possesses some good qualities, humility does not demand him to disavow them, and still less to deny them. Surely St. Thomas Aquinas, wise and humble as he was, would never say or think that in Philosophy and Theology he knew less than the cook of his monastery. What God and men require of us is that we appreciate all the gifts of God as given us, and that we make good use of them for the glory of God and the benefit of our neighbor.

10. Whatever good qualities we may possess, whether physical or moral, material or spiritual, of nature or of grace, we possess them, not as our own acquisition, but as held by us in trust for God, to whom at the end of life we must

render a detailed account of all, of the little as well as of the great. We know God wants nothing idle in His creation or in His creatures, and we know also how the wicked and slothful servant was treated by his master. (5) Each gift therefore carries with it a responsibility. The prudent and the wise endeavor to render a good account of their talents. Whereas the foolish and slothful squander the little they have received, displaying or hiding it like the servant in the Gospel.

11. The same harmony and dependence on each other that we find in the physical world God wants to find among men in the moral world. And because everything enters in this universal concert, God does not hate any of His creatures. Therefore He has commanded us to love one another as children of the same Father and to do to others whatsoever we would that men should do to us. (6) Therefore also whatever gifts He has given us He bestowed them for the purpose of helping our brethren: *Let no man therefore glory in men. For all things are yours, whether it be Paul, or Apollo, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; for all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.* (7) *Freely have you received,*

(5) Matt. XXV. 26.

(6) Matt. VII. 12.

(7) I Cor. III. 21, 23.

*freely give.* (8) says the Divine Redeemer, and St. Paul adds: *I endure all things for the sake of the elect.* (9)

Consequently each of the gifts we have received, whether of nature or of grace, supposes so many responsibilities before Divine Providence, who does nothing and grants nothing without some purpose; we have, moreover, many other titles of obligation towards God, ourselves, and our brethren. Jesus Christ therefore said: *When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which we ought to do.* (10) To understand this perfectly and to act accordingly both in public and in private life, is to walk in truth. And this and only this is being really humble.

12. Thus must humility be understood according to the spirit of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross; no pusillanimity or vanity, no repulsive dissembling, no ridiculous ostentation is pleasing to them. Sincerity always and in all things, with much light in the mind and fire of charity in the heart; this is what they always practised and taught their children, that through this light and heat genuine humility may produce its fruits!

Consequently, according to the great Masters of Carmel, vanity and pride always suppose some

(8) Matt. X. 8.

(9) 2 Tim. II. 10.

(10) Luke XVII. 10.

defect in the mind and in the heart. Because when there is much love of God and of the neighbor in the heart, an abundance of light in the mind, and much uprightness in the spirit, man instead of vainly glorifying himself, admiring the little good he possesses, and wishing that others also should admire it, is solicitous in seeing what he can do for the glory of God or the benefit of his neighbor, and makes every effort to correct his defects and to foster his virtues.

13. Our holy Mother's words on this matter are worthy of all our attention: *The foundation of this edifice is humility; and if this does not truly exist; even for your own good the Lord will not raise you very high, lest you tumble to the ground. Therefore, sister, in order to lay a good foundation, try to be the least of all, and everybody's slave; consider how you can give them pleasure and serve them; for what you do in this way is really more for yourself than for others, since you are laying such solid stones in the foundation that your castle may not fall.* (11)

In accordance with the admirable teaching of our holy Mother, it is a particular benefit of Divine Goodness not to grant a multitude of gifts to those who have not a sufficiently solid foundation of humility to sustain them and to bring forth worthy fruits. Ah! How many gifts of all



kinds are detained in the hands of God by our spirit of pride and vanity!

Our holy Mother, in her "Way of Perfection," which is her really ascetic work, says that all religious perfection consists in three things: *The one is love for one another; the other detachment from all created things; and the third, true humility, which, though I give it last, is the principal and embraces all.* (12)

Our holy Father tells us that this spirit and these feelings of a humble soul are most directly opposed to the spirit of the devil. But this will form the subject-matter of the next chapter.

(12) Way of Perfection IV.

## CHAPTER XV

### HUMILITY AND PRIDE

1. HOW HUMILITY IS DIRECTLY OPPOSED TO THE DIABOLICAL SPIRIT.—2. HOW MUCH GOD LOVES THE HUMBLE.—3. HUMILITY THE FOUNDATION OF GREATNESS. TEACHING OF THE DIVINE MASTER ON HUMILITY.—4. THE WHOLE LIFE AND DOCTRINE OF JESUS A CANTICLE OF HUMILITY.—5. GOD TAKES PLEASURE IN HUMBLING THE PROUD AND CASTING THEM ASIDE.—6. THE PROUD SEEK TO APPROPRIATE THE GLORY DUE TO GOD ALONE.—7. PRIDE, THE MOST DEEPLY ROOTED CAPITAL SIN, A DEVIATION OF A HOLY ASPIRATION.—8. SELF-LOVE NOT BAD IN ITSELF, BUT ONLY IN ITS WAYS AND MEANS. IS A SURE ROAD TO GREATNESS.—9. WORDS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—10. PRIDE THE FATHER OF ENVY. IT DESTROYS SOULS.—11. THE WICKED SPIRIT FOSTERS IT. VERY COMMON EVIL.

1. Our holy Father tells us that this precaution in which he recommends humility, is *directly opposed to the devil*. The last two precautions are also opposed to him, but humility is more directly so and for various reasons. First of all humility, as was said in the previous chapter, is inseparable from truth. The devil, as our Lord warns us, is the strong enemy of truth; whenever he speaks, he lies. *For he is a liar, and the father thereof.* (1) Moreover, truth presupposes a certain disaffec-

(1) John VIII. 44. —

tion of self and some perfection in the love of God, in such a manner that humility increases in proportion as self-contempt and the love of God increase. Therefore, the same holy Father adds: *When you have perfectly detached your heart from all things, which is the summit of humility, then the union of the soul with God will be accomplished.*

The evil spirit can not love God nor anybody else; St. Thomas says: *They cannot have any love even for one another.* (2) Finally, the humble forgetting themselves rejoice at the glory of God and the good of their neighbor, and strive with all their might to promote the common welfare and the divine glory. The spirit of Satan, as the Angelic Doctor explains, is directly opposed to this: he has no other and cannot have properly speaking more than two sins, pride and envy; both of which are directly opposed to the effects of humility in the soul, to the disaffection of self and complacency in the glory of God and the welfare of the neighbor: *The evil spirits sinned by coveting a singular excellence, and this ceases to be singular when some other excellence is present. Consequently, after the sin of pride in the wicked spirits, there followed the sin of envy, which causes them to grieve over the welfare of men and also over the Divine excellence.* (3)

(2) I P. Q. 109, a. 2. a. II.

(3) I Q. 63, a. 2.

Therefore, humility is directly opposed to the evil spirit, both as regards the principle on which it is founded and the effects it produces in the soul. This is certainly the reason why Holy Scripture shows how detestable pride is and so strongly recommends humility.

2. The humble are always depicted in Holy Scripture as the dearest to God: *The Lord is high above all nations; and His glory above the heavens. Who is the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high; and looketh down on the low things in heaven and on earth?* (4) *The High and the Eminent that inhabited eternity, dwelleth with the contrite and humble spirit,* (5) says Isaias the Prophet; and the same prophet again: *Thus saith the Lord, Heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool. . . . to whom shall I respect, but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit.* (6) David assures us that the Lord never despises a contrite and humble heart, (7) and God Himself tells us that He spoke with His servant Moses heart to heart: *I speak to him mouth to mouth, and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord,* and in a few verses before the Scripture remarks that: *Moses was a man exceedingly meek above all men that dwelleth upon earth.* (8)

(4) Ps. CXII. 4, 6.

(5) Is. LVII. 15.

(6) Is. LXVI. 1-2.

(7) Ps. L. 19.

(8) Num. XII. 3.



3. According to the Wise Man humility is the necessary foundation for all solid and durable greatness; and therefore he warns us: *The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God; for great is the power of God alone, and He is honored by the humble.* (9) *Before a man is exalted, he is humbled.* (10) Since humble souls alone can enter into heaven it is necessary that humility always precede the glory: *Humility goeth before glory.* (11) When the apostles asked our Lord who would be the greater in the kingdom of God, the Divine Redeemer took a child and set him in the midst of them, and said: *Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.* (12) *And whosoever shalt exalt himself shall be humbled; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.* (13)

How many times have we not heard these words of our Savior, and notwithstanding, how hard do we find it to make them the guiding principle of our life! We could multiply by hundreds the passages of Holy Scripture that eulogize humility and meekness. Let us add but one more, full of beauty and consolation: *Learn of me, because I*

(9) Ec. III. 20-21.

(10) Prov. XVII. 12.

(11) Prov. XV. 33.

(12) Matt. XVIII. 4.

(13) Matt. XVIII. 12.

*am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. (14)* Our Lord knew well how much it would cost us to imitate this charming virtue, and for this reason He recommends it with so much insistence. He knew that we are excessively jealous of our dignity and honor, that a trifle can hurt and irritate us, and that we think we must take good care that nobody advance a step before us. To cure us of this excessive susceptibility, the meek and lowly Master teaches us: *The disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord. (15)* *You call me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. (16)* Learn of me, not my infinite wisdom, not the power to subject the demons, to raise the dead, to command the elements; but learn the humility and meekness of my heart. *I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also. (17)* *And happy and blessed if you know these things and do them. (18)*

4. The divine Master spoke these words in His last sermon, His farewell address to His disciples. He finished His preaching as He commenced it. On the mountain of the Beatitudes He began with that doctrine so new, so singular and sublime, calling blessed the peaceful, the

(14) Matt. XI. 29.

(15) Matt. X. 24.

(16) John XIII. 13.

(17) John XIII. 15.

(18) John XIII. 17.

clean, and the meek of heart, (19) and He takes leave of the world, proclaiming those also blessed who comprehend and practise his lesson of humility and meekness. The whole doctrine of Christ was a canticle of humility and meekness, and His life was the most perfect model of these virtues. All this was necessary that some chosen souls might imitate this spirit of humility and meekness, which is the spirit of Jesus and so contrary to the spirit of the world.

5. It is evident that the more pleasing holy obedience is to God, the more hateful must be the contrary vice of pride. The holy Scripture points out several examples of insolence and pride, and then compares them with the downfall and the humiliation that followed. Of King Antiochus, a perfect model of pride, it says: *He that seemed to himself to command even the waves of the sea, being proud above the condition of man, and to weigh the heights of the mountains in a balance, now being cast down to the ground, was carried in a litter, bearing witness to the manifest power of God in himself.* (20) Sennacherib is another instance of pride. He threatened the chosen people with destruction, saying: *I have gone up to the height of the mountains, to the top of Libanus, and have cut down its tall cedars, and its choice fir trees. I have entered into the furthest part thereof,*

(19) Matt. III. 4.

(20) II Mach. IX. 8.

*and the forest of its Carmel. But the Lord sent him this message by the Prophet Isaias: Thy pride hath come up to my ears; therefore I will put a ring in thy nose, and a bit between thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest. (21) Then the Lord sent His angel and in one night destroyed the powerful army of the Assyrians. (22) Thy arrogancy hath deceived thee, and the pride of thy heart. But though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as an eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord. (23)*

The Lord cannot tolerate the proud. God resisteth the proud. He turns them away as we turn our eyes from a loathsome object. It is not strange that pride is so repugnant to the Lord. He is infinite justice and goodness and takes pleasure in communicating His riches and grace to His angels and to men of good will, but He cannot give away His glory to any one; for if He were deprived of His glory, He would cease to be God; *I the Lord; this is my name; I will not give my glory to another. (24)*

6. The sin of pride consists in the desire of appropriating the glory due to God alone. Behold why God despises the proud and is pleased with the humble. Therefore Divine Providence justly and wisely permits that loftiness of mind

(21) 4 Kings XIX. 23, 28.

(22) 4 Kings XIX. 35.

(23) Jer. XLIX. 16.

(24) Is. XLII. 8.



and arrogance of heart should often be succeeded in this life by most bitter deceptions and humiliating misfortunes; whereas sincere humility is generally followed by legitimate glory and genuine esteem. *Where pride is, there also shall be reproach*, says Solomon; and David adds: *I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus; and I passed by, and lo, he was not; and I sought him and his place was not found.* (25)

7. Pride, the first capital sin, has most deeply corrupted human nature and caused the greatest ruin in souls. Pride in its final analysis is nothing else than the turning aside of a profound and wholesome aspiration of the human spirit. It does not destroy, but it introduces a certain aberration into the natural desire existing in every man of being esteemed and honored. This desire is certainly not bad in itself. Did not God create man to be king? Did He not Himself say to our first parents: *Fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air.* (26) Was it not the same Creator who placed in our spirit the never hushed aspiration for greatness, and the never mitigated craving for ascending higher and higher?

Pride is self-love seeking inordinately its own excellence. But self-love is not bad, either in its

(25) Ps. XXXVI. 35, 36.

(26) Gen. I. 28.

origin or in its end, for God Himself placed it in the human heart; nor is it bad in its aim; for if it seeks its own excellence, we know that God has not created us for infamy but for glory. *We are confident*, said St. Paul, *and have a good will to be absent rather from the body, and to be present with the Lord.* (27) And at the last supper our Lord prayed His eternal Father in reward for His passion: *Father, I will that where I am, they also whom thou hast given me may be with me.* (28)

8. The evil of self-love is not that man loves himself and seeks his own excellence, but it consists rather in the manner in which he loves self and in the means he uses to aspire to a superior condition in life. St. Thomas Aquinas has the following profound sentence: *Nobody has affection to anything which in some way is not suited to his nature. But there can be no sin when anyone is incited to good of the spiritual order; unless in such affection the rule of the superior be not kept. Such is precisely the sin of pride, not to be subject to a superior where subjection is due.* (29)

Our first parents did not sin by wishing to be like unto God, for they were made to the image and likeness of God, but because they wished to enjoy the prerogative of semi-gods before the time; and thus they broke the precept given them by God. And when we commit the sin of pride,

(27) 2 Cor. V. 8.

(28) John XVII. 24.

(29) 1 P. Q. LXII. I. a. 2.

it is not because we esteem our excellence, but because we seek it where it is not, or we pretend to acquire it by means not proper nor intended by God for this end. Our excellence is in God alone: *He that glorieth, may glory in the Lord*, (30) says St. Paul; and again: *Let no man therefore glory in men*. (31) And the only road to this sublime excellence, is the faithful fulfilment of the law in the spirit of humility and meekness: *But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*, (32) And *Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of God*. (33) This is the clear and positive sentence of Him who cannot deceive nor be deceived; to give it a different meaning would be to deceive ourselves.

9. This is also the teaching of St. John of the Cross: *When God loves the soul, it is not on account of its greatness, but on account of the greatness of its self-contempt and humility*. (34) Hence the more one belittles himself and acknowledges himself as nothing before God, the more God lifts him up, and vice versa. The Almighty is pleased in humbling those who exalt themselves unjustly. And why should man exalt himself? If there is any good in him, it is from God: *Who*

(30) 1 Cor. I. 31.

(31) 1 Cor. III. 21.

(32) Matt. XIX. 17.

(33) Matt. XVIII. 3.

(34) Max. 326.

*distinguished thee? What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as thou hadst not received it?* (35) Our Father St. John of the Cross tells us: *If you wish to glory and not to seem foolish, detach yourself from all things that are not properly yours, and in what remains you can glory. It is certain that if you detach yourself from the things that are not yours, you will be nothing; then you can glory in nothing, or fall into vanity.*

10. One of the worst and most repugnant features of pride is that it necessarily brings jealousy along with it. It is natural that he who is always anxious about his personal excellence and glory, should feel sadness when he sees others possess and enjoy what he so ardently desires but cannot have. Envy is a loathing and sadness over the welfare and happiness of the neighbor. It is the most despicable of all vices found in human souls excepting that of pride. It is directly opposed to the noblest and highest human feeling which is amity, a sweet complacency of the heart at the welfare of others. Feelings of envy cause the greatest havoc in the poor soul that entertains them; they kill all its noble and delicate sentiments, embitter all pleasures, even the purest and holiest, and sometimes render intolerable the life

(35) 1 Cor. IV. 7.

(36) Max. 326.



of persons who could enjoy the sweet peace and contentment of the children of God.

The child of pride and the twin-sister of jealousy, envy wants the *ego* alone to be exalted; and when it cannot succeed in this, it despises all and all despise it; it hates and becomes hateful itself. Pride would have all honor and happiness for itself alone, but contrariwise, it nearly always reaps dislike and humiliation; for this reason it takes a singular pleasure in injuring the honor of the neighbor and in destroying the peace and happiness he enjoys. Pride and envy are the characteristics of the evil spirit from whom they originally proceeded, and by whom they are fomented and fostered.

11. The devil envies others because they are destined for the glory he has lost, and rejoices when he can prevent some one from attaining it. Since he cannot love, he takes a singular pleasure in hindering others from loving. As the snake injects its poison into those who approach it, so the evil spirit infiltrates his envy into men. The Holy Scripture says that *envy is the rottenness of the bones*; (37) for as rottenness always destroys the vital tissues of the body and torments the patient, similarly envy torments and wastes the heart and mind that it possesses. It is so mean a vice that it can take root among all classes of persons and nobody is entirely free from it, even

(37) Prov. XIV. 30.

among those who aspire to be perfect. In some way it creeps in more among such persons where it can dissemble itself best. Just as the snake winds through the most beautiful flower gardens, so envy begins to nestle in the innocent hearts of children, and it will not leave in peace even those who wish to walk, and in fact do walk along the paths of virtue and honor.

But this will be seen better when studying the effects of pride in souls, which forms the subject-matter of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XVI

### VANITY AND PRIDE

1. PRIDE AND WINE.—2. SELF-LOVE IS A HELP TO VIRTUE.—3. ALL ARE CHILDREN OF GOD. THE NOTHING OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS. IT IS NECESSARY TO EDUCATE SELF-LOVE; NOT TO DESTROY IT.—4. LITTLE TALENT IS NEEDED TO KNOW SELF-LOVE. VANITY, THE FIRST FRUIT OF SELF-LOVE. THE VAIN AND THE DRUNKARD.—5. PRIDE RISES THREATENINGLY OVER THE RUINS OF VANITY. A DIABOLICAL VICE. CONTRADICTION AND OVERTHROW ENLIVEN IT.—6. VANITY AND PRIDE MUST BE CURED FROM WITHIN.—7. A HARMLESS SILLY PRIDE IS ALMOST INNOCENT. THE VAIN QUICKLY BECOME PROUD. THE PROUD ARE LIKE DRUNKARDS, NEVER SATISFIED.—8. PRIDE, A UNIVERSAL VICE. ITS MANIFOLD EXPRESSIONS.—9. TALENT IS NOT ENOUGH TO AVOID PRIDE. MEN THINK WELL AS LONG AS THEIR SELFISHNESS IS NOT HURT.—10. "LEAVE HIM ALONE, FOR THAT IS HIS WAY."—11. THIS EVIL IS NOT RECOGNIZED BY THOSE AFFECTED. WORDS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—12. CURE OF SELF-LOVE.—13. HUMILITY AND CHARITY. IT IS RIGHT TO ASK MUCH FROM RELIGIOUS PERSONS.—14. FOUNDATION OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. OVERCOME EVIL BY GOOD.—15. VALUE OF AN ACT OF HUMILITY. DRIVE THE DEVIL AWAY. REJOICING OF THE HEART.

1. The effects of pride in the soul are many and lamentable. They cannot be expressed more energetically and profoundly than Holy Scripture does by one of the Prophets: *As the wine de-*

ceives him that drinketh it, so shall the proud man be. (1) A little wine is not harmful, as the Wise Man says: *Wine was created from the beginning to make men joyful, and not to make them drunk. Wine drunken with moderation is the joy of the soul and of the heart.* (2) It is healthy, for it strengthens the nerves, quickens the fantasy, and is a powerful stimulant of all the vital forces. But when more is taken than is expedient and even before reaching any excess, it renders a man too mirthful and makes him wanting in propriety. If the excess is notable, it soon dazzles or entirely darkens the mind and then a repugnant intoxication appears in all its multiplex stages. The same happens with pride. It is only a turning aside of self-love, inasmuch as it becomes excessive or that man takes exclusive complacency in his own excellence.

2. Neither is self-love bad in itself. God has not created anybody to hate himself. The instinct of self-preservation and self-esteem was infused into the soul by God. Self-love, well understood and properly regulated, is a great help for the acquisition of virtue and is the necessary support of public and private morality. Without eagerness for excellency and glory man would grow stupid like irrational animals; he would aspire but to sensual pleasures. Hope, honor, and

(1) Hab. II. 5.

(2) Ecc. XXXII. 35.



glory would be meaningless words to him. Without the sentiment of honor and self-esteem, no action would seem dishonorable, no vice degrading, and that most delicate sentiment of bashfulness infused by God Himself into the heart as the faithful defender of virtue, would be considered ridiculous. God has not created man to despise himself absolutely, and to make himself an abject being. He Himself tells us: *You are gods and all of you sons of the most High.* (3)

3. If we are the children of God, then we must esteem and behave ourselves as such. Nobody ever had a higher estimation of human dignity than the saints, and they were the most humble men because they understood well these words: *Our Father, who art in Heaven.* (4) But the house of our Father is still very far off, and with our personal effort assisted by divine grace we have to travel towards it. But were we to entertain only feelings of absolute abjection and contempt of ourselves, we would scarcely make any effort to fulfil our duties in the hope of enjoying the beatific vision in the eternal mansion of God.

When the saints recommend humiliations, they do not mean that man should renounce absolutely every sentiment of honor and excellence, because this would be spiritual degradation. The saints knew well that true and sincere humility is the

(3) Ps. LXXXI. 6.

(4) Matt. VI. 9.

sole means of acquiring true honor and glory; and this not only in the other life, but also in the present. Therefore our Father St. John of the Cross adopted these mottos; each of which is worth a treatise on abnegation and joy, on humility and glory.

*When I desired nothing, all was given me unsought. After I had become nothing, I found that nothing was wanting. The less you desire to be anything, the more you will become something.* Self-love must not therefore be totally extinguished, but properly attended to and regulated. Here lies precisely the difficulty. To persist in destroying self-love is an illusion, inasmuch as it is contrary to nature itself. To pretend to form the heart after this fashion would be to kill it, to counterfeit virtue making it odious like all falsehood and impracticable like everything else in conflict with nature.

4. To understand this and to act accordingly in all the circumstances of life, a certain natural talent and a great energy of character are at least required. Therefore St. Teresa of Jesus was so much afraid of persons of limited mental capacity and of those who, having some qualities, had only partly developed them. The ignorant and the half-learned, as she says, made her suffer most. Whoever is incapable of understanding self-love well, and of tracing it in the folds of his own heart and soul in which it so sagaciously conceals itself, will never know how to guide and gov-

ern others; and he who loses control of his self-love will soon fall into lamentable disorders.

In the first place he will certainly be vain. The arrogant is like one who has drunk a little too much, but not to excess, for vanity is only a little deviation of self-love. The resemblance is very strong. The vain and the half intoxicated are generally as joyful as they are inoffensive; one might almost say that they are good, for they are inclined to lavish favors on those in need. They do not despise anybody nor entertain any ill will towards anybody. They are satisfied with themselves and experience an intimate satisfaction and joy like children when narrating their deeds. They are even content that others too should feel happy, provided their own admirable qualities are recognized and thereby their own happiness is increased. The vain therefore provoke compassion and pity rather than indignation or contempt. Alas, how many there are who disfigure their good qualities with their deplorable vanity! Better still, where is the man who can believe himself free from these weaknesses at once so childish and withal so human? How much worthier it would be if we could always restrain the desire of wanting others to occupy themselves with us in season and out of season, and also if we were to conquer a little the fear, lest they be occupied with us. The excessive desire of praise and the fear of being criticized unjustly, are both children of vanity and pride.

5. Vanity however is not the greatest delusion of self-love. He who does not restrain his vanity will soon fall into the vice of pride, just like the man who does not control himself in drinking more than is necessary, quickly becomes a perfect drunkard. Vanity is the mother and the nurse of pride, the final evolution of self-love. It is most certain that vanity will degenerate into pride unless the greatest care and discretion are exercised to control it. Contradiction and deception can kill vanity, but if the heart and the mind where vanity radiates, are not healed, pride will rise on the ruins of vanity. And thus the second state of that man will be incomparably worse than the first. The proud man is occupied only with himself, he thinks only of himself, he wants every one and everything to serve his purpose, he disdains all else, and if he is interested in them it is only inasmuch as they contribute to his satisfaction. The highest expression of the intoxication of pride was displayed by the devil, when he offered the Son of God all the kingdoms of the earth and said to Him: *All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me.* (5) The deeper pride roots and radiates in the spirit, the more it will encounter contradiction. St. Thomas says of the devil, the first principle of pride, that as he cannot repent, his many disgraceful losses serve only to increase his pride, and suffering far from softening only hardens him.

(5) Matt. IV. 9.



6. Something similar happens to man. Vanity is the first and the least offensive manifestation of disordered self-love. It will never be cured by contradictions. The humiliation that does not proceed from our own conscience, and is not the result of truth and of the acknowledgment of our own weaknesses is not good. Mere external humiliation far from remedying it, makes it only worse. Sometimes it may be expedient and even necessary to humble haughty men or to oblige timid persons to reflect on their weakness. But as a system it may give rise to disastrous results. Self-love is within the spirit, and the remedy must be applied from within if we wish to correct or direct it: *First, make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside may become clean*, (6) says our Lord in the Gospel.

7. If contradictions and humiliations do not draw us within, then they are more harmful than beneficial. The vain man, as long as he is merely vain, is like a spoiled child. We might almost say he is sincere and simple, for in him there is not much virtue or malice. He carries his heart on his sleeve, not to expose it to great sacrifices, but that others should see, praise, and caress it. As it is rather difficult to obtain this for long, the vain person often receives slights instead of attentions, in place of praise, blame, and instead of the fancied satisfaction of esteem and love, he meets with

(6) Matt. XXIII. 26.

upbraidings and reproaches that hurt his delicate sentiments. If he does not then withdraw within himself and summon his heart and his mind before the tribunal of his conscience, to give his thoughts and affections a better direction, he will turn against those who have wounded his feelings, and will pass from vanity to pride. If while only vain, he was not able to satisfy his longing for esteem and love, much less will he succeed now when pride is supplanting the vanity of his heart and mind. The greater the contradiction, the more wounded will he feel himself, and the greater dislike and aversion will he have for those who contradicted him; while they in their turn will show him greater antipathy. Let us then learn to educate our self-love properly and in its very beginnings, lest it degenerate into inordinate self-affection, which soon transforms itself into vanity, and vanity into the most repulsive pride.

Holy Scripture confirms our assertion: *The pride of them that hate thee ascendeth continually.* (7) The proud are like the intoxicated, the more these drink, the thirstier they are, and the more stupid and degraded they become. The Prophet Habacuc, after having compared the proud with the drunkard, says: *So shall the proud man be, and he shall not be honored; who hath enlarged his desire like hell; and is himself like death, and he is never satisfied.* (8)

(7) LXXIII. 23.

(8) Hab. II. 5.

8. This terrible description of pride should be sufficient to make us love the virtue of humility and hate the repugnant vice of pride. But notwithstanding its repulsiveness, it is the most common vice in the world. No other is more deeply seated within us and we can exclaim with Solomon: *Who can say, my heart is clean, I am pure from sin?* (9) Pride does not take the same form nor the same intensity in all persons. There is nothing in the moral order more varied than the different manifestations of pride. From those first and almost unconscious movements of self-complacency which occasionally surprise consecrated persons even in their best works of piety, to that perfect pride which displays a hatred for all as well as stubborn persistence in the evil, there are nearly infinite degrees, and consequently the manifestations of pride are also innumerable and most varied. Pride aims at converting into efficient helpers not only talent, but even virtue, and that notwithstanding their natural antipathy for each other.

9. This vice is found and sometimes most deeply rooted, even in persons whose talent, good sense, and rectitude of judgment are beyond all doubt. It is frequent in any social circle whether in the cloister or in the world. It exists among persons who think well and see clearly in all matters except those in which self-love inter-

(9) Prov. XX. 9.

venes; then they reason in a most ludicrous manner and it is useless to argue with them on these matters, for then they are guided, not by reason, but by the feelings which the bleeding wounds of self-love call forth. Under the influence of these emotions they bitterly assail those who venture to differ from them in their opinion, and perhaps they may even despise them, considering them ignorant and not able to see things as they do, for their pride renders all so very clear.

10. Men of this class are to be found everywhere, and people seem to have reached the conclusion that when men are in this condition they are incurable and intractable. For this reason we say when we meet one: "Let him alone, that is his way." This means: "It is necessary to yield, not because he has truth and justice on his side, but because he is selfish, because that is his way." And perhaps he may feel a certain complacency in being treated after this manner. Perhaps even he takes delight in stubbornly defending his view, not because he believes it true or just, but that others should see that he does not withdraw at any rate; let others know well that this is his way. Can there be anything more dishonorable and humiliating than to be treated after this fashion? Indeed, fools and drunkards meet with the same treatment. Pride is therefore justly styled an intoxication of the spirit. Let us repeat with the Holy Ghost: *As the drunkard is deceived by wine, so is man by pride.*



11. The greatest danger of this vice consists in the fact that the one afflicted generally does not recognize it. It is like phthisis, which is known by all except the patient himself. Many persons would be frightened if they could convince themselves that a great part of their actions are inspired and animated by a secret pride which lurks in the innermost recess of their souls. The vice of pride does not spare any state or condition. Our Father St. John of the Cross says that even persons who have been favored with supernatural graces can most easily fall into this ugly vice, and he lays down most wise rules to know when one is suffering from this dangerous illness:

*Men might see this very clearly, if they would but reflect on that feeling of dislike and aversion produced in them by those, who do not commend their spirit, or attribute any value to their experiences, on that feeling of distress, which they have when they are told that others also have the like or greater gifts. All this is the fruit of secret self-esteem and pride, and they cannot be made to understand that they are steeped in it up to their very eyes. They think that a certain recognition of their own wretchedness is sufficient, while at the same time they are filled with secret self-esteem and personal satisfaction, taking more delight in their own spirit and gifts than in those of another. They are like the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like the rest of men. Now these men do not say this in so many words, as*

*the Pharisee did, but they habitually think so; and some of them even become so proud as to be worse than devils. (10) To avoid this pestilent evil, abominable in the sight of God, says the same holy Father, there are two considerations. The first is that virtue does not consist in apprehensions and feelings about God . . . nor in any personal experience of this kind, but on the contrary, in that which is not matter of feeling at all, in great humility, contempt of ourselves and of all that belongs to us, profoundly rooted in the soul. The second is, that all visions, revelations, and heavenly feelings . . . are not worth the least act of humility bearing the fruits of that charity which neither values nor seeks itself, which thinketh no evil except of self, which thinketh well not of self, but all others. (11)*

12. Pride, vanity, and jealousy are then nothing more than so many degrees or manifestations of self-love wrongly understood or wrongly and ineffectually guided. Nearly all souls suffer more or less from these weaknesses. To offer outward violence is not the best system for curing them, the opposition must come from within assisted by divine grace, which is obtained by humble and persevering prayer, by interior light and truth which must inform and actuate our conscience. In a conscience informed and enlivened

(10) 3 Ascent, Chapter VIII.

(11) 3 Ascent, VIII. 3, 4.

in this way, consists the true character of man. When the truth is well known and meditated upon we shall understand what we are and what God is; how great is our misery and how lofty our destiny in the sight of God; how humility embellishes the soul and makes it lovable before God and men, and how pride deforms and torments the soul when under its influence, making it hateful to God, intolerable to itself, and detestable to men.

To acquire the charming virtue of humility and to root out the repulsive vice of pride, there is need of our personal effort together with divine grace. The personal effort should consist in opposing very peacefully but at the same time very energetically, every movement of vanity and of pride, and in always practising the contrary virtue of humility. By the constant repetition of the same actions, the habit of performing them naturally, as it were, is acquired, and it is in this habit that the moral virtue consists. Our holy Father recommends this exercise in his third precaution against the devil. *Try, he says, to humble yourself always in thoughts, words, and actions, taking more pleasure in the welfare of others than in your own, and wishing they should be preferred to you in all things, and do this with a sincere heart.* Much is asked of us here; we are not permitted to flatter our self-love in thoughts, words, or deeds, that we may not in any way encourage our vanity and petulancy.



13. We are also commanded to unite charity with humility, for we are told to rejoice in the welfare of our neighbor more than in our own. This is true charity according to the Gospel. But our holy Father is not yet satisfied; he wants us to desire that our brethren *be preferred to us in all things*. To love all, not to desire evil to any one, and to wish that all may enjoy what we ourselves enjoy, is very noble and seems natural and even relatively easy. But our Father wants us to *desire* that they *should be preferred* to us in *all things*; and he adds: *Try to do this with those who are less agreeable to you*.

Really much is demanded of weak human nature. But undoubtedly he had the right to speak so when addressing religious. He supposed us to be well informed on what the religious state is, and how necessary humility is for this state, for he had taught us all this by his books and his example. He could well say to us with St. Paul: *I speak to them that know the law*, (12) the law of the Gospel and of the Order we have professed. These precautions are intended for us who profess that the worship of God and our sanctification are our principal occupation; and we are not ignorant that those who adore God, *must adore Him in spirit and in truth*. (13) If it is not so, then our profession and our life are a disgraceful farce, since without humility our spirit and our

(12) Rom. VII. 1.

(13) John IV. 24.



works cannot be acceptable to God, for the proud are an abomination before Him.

14. Humility properly understood is the necessary foundation of the religious life; therefore our Mother St. Teresa said to her daughters: *Let each one look and see how much humility she has and she will know how far she has advanced!*

Our Holy Father while recommending to us these exercises tells us twice, at the beginning and at the end, that they *must come from our heart, from our whole heart*. By this he wished to make us understand that here there is no question of mere formalities or disciplinary dispositions, which are satisfied with external actions, but he wants all our actions to bear the stamp of a complete and sincere conviction, which he expresses by the words *from our heart, and from our whole heart*.

In the teaching of St. John of the Cross and of St. Teresa, the spirit of sincerity and truth is always evident. They do not allow us to do anything through routine and still less through a spirit of hypocrisy. All must be done with the full knowledge of what we are doing, *all from our whole heart*. Our holy Father tells us that by practising these maxims faithfully we shall *overcome evil by good*. Never to be overcome by evil, but to destroy the evil by an abundance of good is the privilege of humble souls. Hard and high rocks form a strong barrier to the waves of the

sea, but as the waves strike them century after century, they are finally undermined and tumble down; but the lowly sand of the shore does not oppose the fury of the same waves; on the contrary, in the layers of fine, clean sand, the enraged waves are calmed and broken up. It is the same with humble souls; by the abundance of their goodness they extinguish and destroy the violence of evil. When two proud hearts come into conflict they mutually hurt each other. Both are conquered, each by the evil or want of virtue in the other. The only gainer is the devil, who takes great pleasure in such encounters between persons not well grounded in humility.

15. On the contrary, nothing confuses him more than a sincere act of humility on the part of the person whom he wanted to tempt. Does not our holy Father teach that an act of true humility is better than any other work we can do for God? A simple act of humility is more meritorious than the performance of great miracles; because in the miracle all depends on the power of God, whereas in acts of humility we give of our own. By each sincere act of humility done for God we increase greatly our future glory in heaven, and we honor the Lord with this simple worship of our heart, which is so pleasing to Him. And as the glory of God and the salvation of souls are most hated by the evil spirit, he leaves those souls alone who at every suggestion of his make sincere acts of humility, and because God

corresponds with a certain supernatural help for future battles with the enemy.

Therefore our holy Father says that by the practice of acts of humility *you will drive the devil far away and bring joy into your heart.* When far away from the devil and blessed with special graces, we cannot but enjoy great peace in our souls. This should show humble souls how near they are to the Lord. Our holy Father concludes: *And you must know that if you do not exercise it, you will never have true charity, nor advance in it.* This is the result of all that has been said, for humility is not perfect, is not true without charity, nor can charity exist if it has not true humility for its basis.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OUR NEIGHBOR THE AGENT OF OUR SANCTIFICATION

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1. *Three precautions to be observed by those who wish to conquer themselves and overcome their sensuality, their third enemy:*

#### FIRST PRECAUTION

*Let the first precaution be to understand, that if you wish to be freed from the imperfections and uneasiness of which the character and con-*



*versation of the religious may be the occasion, and to profit by everything that may happen, you must bear in mind that you came to the convent to be mortified and tried, and that all those in authority in it are there, as in fact they are, for that purpose. Some will mortify you by words, others by deeds, others by what they think of you; in all this you are to submit yourself as the statue to the polisher, the painter, and the gilder of it. If you do not observe this, you will not learn how to overcome your sensuality and feelings, nor will you know how to live as you ought in the convent with the religious, neither will you ever attain to holy peace, nor free yourself from many obstacles and evils.*

2. The third enemy of man is man himself, inasmuch as he finds within himself obstacles to virtue. These inconveniences proceed sometimes from his less noble part, which is generally called sensuality, and at other times from his heart and mind, for all three—the mind, the heart, and the flesh—offer great opposition to the exercise necessary for our sanctification. Our holy Father understands by this word flesh, our own nature, inasmuch as it raises opposition to all virtuous exercises.

Much has already been written about the hardship and conflicts that man has to sustain against his passions, and therefore it is not necessary to

repeat it here. (1) We are limiting ourselves now to the spirit of these precautions, and therefore we shall study only the manner of conquering and directing the repugnance of nature. First and principally we shall consider those that are directed against the persons with whom we live.

3. God created man a sociable being; fellowship is natural to all. He gave him understanding and the admirable gift of language, that men should understand and love one another and without which man would live a most solitary life in the midst of the universe. He did not feel happy in the first days of the world when placed in that paradise of delights which God had created for him alone. Holy Scripture tells us that, having created all the animals of the earth and all the birds of the air, the Lord brought them before Adam, that he could contemplate them and give to each a suitable name. This was for man an act of royal dignity and power, which would never be equalled by anybody else, and notwithstanding this the first Father of our race was not happy. The vaulted firmament overhead with its myriads of stars, the birds rejoicing in their brilliant plumage and first melodies, the beasts that obeyed him, the trees and plants of paradise with their delicious fruits and beautiful flowers: none could content and satisfy him because he was alone. . . . Yes, he felt alone in the midst of the charms of the first

days of creation. All served him as their king, but none was a companion like to himself. He needed some other creature that would understand him, and understanding would love him, and whom he himself could understand and love. Without a communion of souls men are very lonely, no matter how near to each other they may be in body, for each man needs the company of his fellow creatures.

4. Though God created man a sociable being, we have made this human interchange very difficult by reason of our manifold defects. Since social intercourse is necessary, and since the human defects that render it difficult are many and not easily remedied, a certain *modus vivendi*, if the phraseology is permitted, is necessary to make human intercourse possible and even pleasing, notwithstanding the great defects of men.

This formula of virtue or *modus vivendi* is called social education. Education, as it is ordinarily understood, does not radically root out in the individual any vice, nor does it infallibly produce any virtue. But it imposes on each individual the obligation of hiding his own defects, so as not to cause annoyance to others and it imposes on all the obligation of tolerating in others the defects which they cannot entirely conceal. Therefore has it been said that a good education is a beautiful robe which covers great human weakness, and even very repulsive misery. Therefore, also, those who are weakest and have the great-

est miseries to hide, stand most in need of a good education. This does not imply that in the name of virtue the forms and manners invented by men to render social intercourse agreeable, should be neglected. On the contrary, virtue can and ought to avail itself of the manners that a good education fosters, for all is necessary to enable us to bear one another's burdens and to cultivate mutual good will and esteem!

5. If we all were good and perfect in heart and mind there would be no need of formalism to make ourselves agreeable. Absolute sincerity would then be the only form in social intercourse, and our hearts, like the flowers that open in the full light, would offend nobody but attract every one by the perfume of their virtue. Unfortunately, this ideal perfection is not ours; and so, while attending to our own weaknesses and paying due consideration to other people's shortcomings, we appreciate good social manners that help to make human intercourse more graceful.

Good education, even as it is understood in the world, is an excellent companion of virtue, for they mutually help each other. Forgetfulness of this principle often deprives virtue of its beauty, mars its highest influence, and renders its labors among others fruitless. While the same education enables the wicked to hide many moral miseries and to make the evil more dangerous, because their refined manners help them to dissemble more easily; it therefore becomes necessary for good people to give more splendor to their virtues.



A venerable Bishop, speaking on a certain occasion of persons who belonged to a distinct social class, said: *Generally they are good, for they have many virtues and good qualities and none of the great vices; but very frequently we notice in them some deficiency of education. On the contrary, worldly people have many of the ugly vices and none of the great virtues, but as they nearly always have a fine education, their conversation is very agreeable, notwithstanding their gross vices; whereas the former are intractable, notwithstanding their many virtues.* Great virtue combined with an excellent social education, should make a person a model of human intercourse.

6. Christian charity in connection with the defects of our neighbor, requires much more of us than simple social education; it requires, not only that we overlook these defects in our neighbor, but also that we ignore them as far as possible. Therefore St. Paul says: *Charity thinketh no evil.* (2) When we cannot ignore defects, then we must tolerate them with great firmness of mind; for, says the same Apostle: *Charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* (3) A person with a heart so full of charity would certainly be incom-

(2) I Cor. XIII. 5.

(3) I Cor. XIII. 4-7.

parably better than another who, without this charming virtue, would possess the most refined social manners; because one who is animated with such noble sentiments, must surely make his intercourse agreeable to every sensible person.

7. Our Father St. John of the Cross chooses for himself a still higher point of view. He wants us to bear patiently with the defects and differences of character in our neighbor, but he expects still more. He wants us to profit by them for our own sanctification; and consequently to accept and even desire them as something useful and necessary for the obtaining of a great good. In his maxims against the flesh or disorderly inclinations of nature, he tells us: *Let the first precaution be to understand well that you came to the convent to be mortified and tried by every one.* According to the mind of our holy Father, all persons with whom we have to deal are nothing else than instruments of Divine Providence to deliver us from our pride and egotism, and thus prepare us for heaven. This point of view is incomparably more extensive and beautiful than the idea of social education.

In the second of his "Four Maxims to Religious" the holy Father explains still more this teaching: *It is expedient for him to take this deeply to his heart; that he came to the convent for no other purpose than to be mortified and exercised in virtue; that he is like the stone which is dressed and polished before it is set in the build-*

*ing. He must understand that all those who are in the convent are merely the instruments which God has placed there to try and exercise him by mortifications. Some will exercise him by words, saying what he does not like to hear; others by deeds, doing what he does not like to suffer; others by their habits, being trying and dull in their conversation and manners; others by thoughts, arousing his sensitiveness and causing him to think that they do not like him. All these mortifications and hardships he ought to suffer with great interior patience, and be silent for the love of God, understanding that he came to the congregation for no other purpose than to be mortified and made worthy of heaven.*

8. This is certainly an admirable teaching, a most wonderful and excellent method of studying men and their shortcomings. This explains the thousand human differences, especially among good people, and what Divine Providence intends in permitting this multitude of vexations among His faithful servants; they but carry out the divine designs. Without applying this sound criterion the many little incidents in human life cannot be understood, and because they are not understood they molest and disturb us. But let us look at them from this high vantage point, and it will be understood how one thing can be so repugnant and irritating to some persons and to others the same is tolerable and even desirable. From this height the psychology of the saints and their



strange inclinations are also explained. If the rough stone could understand, it would cherish the hand of the artist which so pitilessly trims it only to polish it the more.

If this manner of viewing things and appreciating them was well fixed in the hearts of men, very soon all sources of dissatisfaction and agitation would dry up and disappear, not only in individuals, but also in religious houses, in families, and in general among all classes of men.

9. We cannot say that this teaching is new nor peculiar to the holy Doctor of Carmel; it is a consequence of the teaching of the Gospel and of the Catholic doctrine of Divine Providence. We know well that in the whole universe there is no being however small, nor are there any habits of men, which are invisible to Divine Providence. God sees all His creatures conjunctively and individually. To each one and to all his characteristic ways God has appointed a special end, a certain harmony in the order of the universe. These special ends co-operate admirably to the glory of God and the sanctification and advantage of the elect.

Is not this the reason why our Divine Redeemer calling the attention of His disciples to some little birds said to them: *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, better are you than many sparrows.*(4)

(4) Matt. X. 29.



And St. Paul says: *This is the will of God, your sanctification.*(5) *And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as according to His purpose are called to be saints.* (6) We are all called to holiness, and especially those of us who have consecrated ourselves by a religious profession.

We all know this only too well, and not one of those consecrated to God is ignorant of the fact that whatever happens to him is permitted by Providence, that he may avail himself of it to further his sanctification. It is a truth habitually in our mind and very frequently on our lips. But how different this is from taking it *deeply to heart*, thereby to regulate our feelings and conduct in all the circumstances of life.

10. Certainly this truth was well taken to heart by King David. When fleeing from his son Absalom he forgave Semei who insulted him most grievously, calling him a man of Belial; so far went the fury of the rebellious subject that he threw sand and stones at his king. To those who asked permission to destroy the insolent man David meekly answered: *Let him alone and let him curse; for the Lord hath bid him curse David; and who is he that shall dare say, why hath he done so? Perhaps the Lord may look upon my*

(5) I Thes. IV. 3.

(6) Rom. VIII. 28.

*affliction, and the Lord may render me good for the cursing of this day. (7)*

David saw in the reproaches of Semei a dispensation of Divine Providence, which if He did not order them directly, permitted them to give the holy king an occasion of practising heroic acts of virtue. It is in fact very difficult always to see Divine Providence in those who are disagreeable to us; but nevertheless it is Providence foreseeing and permitting all the movements of the human heart and regulating the thousand different characters of men. Nothing can be hidden from God; the external and internal actions of men, as well as the most secret movements of their hearts are actually present to Him. If our Lord Jesus Christ tells us that God has counted the very hairs of all the children of Adam, with how much more reason we should believe that the different characters of His children will not pass unnoticed. God alone can sound the human heart; and He alone knows what some persons experience when they meet each other; and nevertheless He permits and even orders them to live together, although they are naturally repulsive to each other.

11. Yes, certainly God has brought these persons together who have a natural antipathy for each other, that through their forbearance and mutual love they may attain to great moral vir-

tues and high sanctity. We must therefore believe that the Lord knows well, that the persons with whom we have to deal so much are not, perhaps very congenial to us. We are agreeable on principle for we wish to serve God, but we cannot in any way agree in secondary matters nor in the details; their criterion is opposed to ours, their manners contrast with ours, their feelings provoke our feelings; Divine Providence knows all this, and yet has permitted and possibly wished that we should live together, that in turn we may make one another suffer and merit.

The fact that persons of such different characters and temperaments should live together in the same house and probably discharge the same duties, is certainly not a casualty nor a mere human disposition; it is Divine Providence Who has disposed or commanded it to be thus. There can be no question of luck, especially in the moral order and much less in the affairs of religious persons.

12. We ought then to believe firmly that those persons who molest us so much, perhaps unconsciously and certainly without any intention of offending us, are the instruments sent by Divine Providence to help us in our sanctification. Their manners so contrary to our feelings, and which convulse our nerves like the discharge of a battery, show how far we are from that perfect control of ourselves, so highly recommended and so justly expected from persons consecrated to

God. That indifference which we take for contempt, and which hurts and irritates us so much at least interiorly, proves how far we are from the admirable meekness of the Savior; and those words, which in the mind of the one who uttered them, were certainly not intentionally bad, but at most wanting a little in prudence, yet to us they seem sarcastic, and offend deeply our sensitiveness, and disturb and rob us of our peace of soul; all goes to show that after many years of religious life, there still lurks in the depths of our soul much pride and sensibility. which a little agitation suffices to bring to the surface. In this manner can those who do not sympathize with us reveal our actual state, and perhaps it was for this purpose that Divine Providence placed them near us, to teach and show us what is most difficult to understand—the knowledge of ourselves.

13. Wounded self-love causes the imagination to distort the offense, making it appear much worse than it really is; this in turn embitters the heart and impels us to revenge, to treat the offender as we imagine he treats us. It hints with diabolic insistence that the only fitting way to deal with him is to leave him strictly alone, and to regard him with silent contempt. A more moderate, human prudence will suggest to withdraw from such persons as much as possible, and to ask the Superior to excuse us from living with people with whom we cannot sympathize. The Christian charity which we owe to ourselves before every



one else tells us as does our holy Father in this precaution: *Behold here a great treasure, do not lose it. Those persons who unconsciously mortify you so much are furnishing you with immense spiritual treasures. By thus agitating your mind and heart, they help you to know yourself better, and every day and hour they provide you with magnificent opportunities of offering to God a multitude of little sacrifices.*

As we know from St. John of the Cross that it is *great wisdom to know how to be silent and to suffer, and not to consider the words and deeds of other people's lives*, (8) and that a single act of abnegation and patience performed through pure love have more merit than working miracles; it is clear that it is more useful for our sanctification to live with people whose character does not agree with our feelings, than with those who are naturally more congenial to us.

14. It is certain that in dealing with such persons we shall often experience some of those inconveniences which embitter our heart and disturb our mind, because they stir up all the base instincts with us. Then we are being offered the best opportunities in our life, if we know how to make good use of them, to humble ourselves, to pray, and to merit. Instead of brooding over uncharitable thoughts with which we only poison our mind and embitter our heart and place our-

(8) Max. 178.

selves in a dangerous position, we ought to kneel before our crucifix and pray devoutly until we regain our peace. This is an easy way to preserve peace of mind in the midst of the greatest perturbations of the imagination and of the heart. Ah, how little self appears when viewed from the heights of a clear conscience and one contemplates his heart so profoundly agitated by a mere trifle! Then if ever our acts of humility come from the bottom of our heart! How much self-knowledge and merit are then acquired in a few minutes of prayer! Peace of soul is quickly recovered and we are strengthened to begin anew. A few minutes of this nature are more useful and efficacious than many months of pious reading and penance.

15. Let us never forget that we owe this blessing occasionally to persons who have been less gracious to us. The company of those who love us and flatter us will never be so useful. On the great day of reckoning we shall see that we are debtors to those who made us suffer, much more than to those who tried to please us and make us happy.

But nobody should desire for himself and on behalf of others the office of executioner; under no pretense should the sufferings of others be a pleasure to any one, and much less should he desire to be their cause. In ancient Rome where the highest pagan civilization came into contact with depths of human degeneration, distinguished ladies and noble senators and citizens could ex-

perience an intimate joy in seeing and making human beings suffer. It is incomprehensible how any one can take pleasure in seeing men, or even animals, suffer, after the doctrine of love was proclaimed which commenced on the Mount of the Beatitudes, and after so many holy men have passed and are still passing through the world, walking in the steps of the Savior, and when men, even those who do not believe, are attracted by the most beautiful lessons of the Gospel, those of charity and meekness.

It is however well known that here and there, even among those who live under the shadow of the cross, are some who take a secret pleasure in seeing and in causing suffering, especially moral suffering. *I like to tease him*; is heard so often from persons who are considered good. Such people are sick either in their mind or heart, or in both. To take pleasure in the suffering of others, whoever they may be, one's heart cannot be formed according to the law of the Gospel, for nobody considers the pleasure of mortifying others so innocent that he would wish to offer it to God as an offering saying: *Oh! my God, I offer Thee the pleasure I have taken to-day in mortifying my brethren.*

16. Notwithstanding all this, it is in the designs of God that we bear patiently the annoyances that we cause one another, because without executioners there could be no martyrs. In this sense martyrs owe to their executioners the im-



mense glory they enjoy in heaven. The martyrdom of spirit is no less pleasing to God than the martyrdom of the body. It is therefore necessary that there be some one to torture mind and heart; certainly nobody desires to be the executioner of the heart and mind of his neighbor, no matter how beneficial it may be to others. Let us beg the Lord not to use us as instruments to sanctify His elect through sorrows caused by us, though we may have unconsciously given occasion of merit to many of them. How much more sympathetic is the office of the good angel, who draws souls to God by love. But although we must not exercise the office of executioner towards any of our brethren, we must accept, and even be grateful to persons of a character different from ours, who have been placed by God near us in order to purify us and make us gain heaven. And this all the more so when, as it nearly always happens among religious persons, those who mortify us do it unconsciously. In this case the one who mortifies us gains as much merit as the one who, with great heroism and the highest motives, accepts the mortification.

17. This explains the exceptional, and for the world incomprehensible psychology of the saints, with their repugnance to praise and flattery and their sincere gratitude for those who mortified them most. We must not wonder therefore at what our holy Mother St. Teresa says in her book



of the Seven Mansions: *These persons feel a great interior joy when they are persecuted, and are far more peaceful than in the former state under such circumstances; they bear no grudge against their enemies nor wish them any ill. Indeed they have great affection for them, are deeply grieved at seeing them in trouble, and do all they can to help them, earnestly interceding with God on their behalf. They would gladly deprive themselves of the special favors of God if they might be given to their enemies instead, to prevent them from offending God. (8)*

This is the high point of view from which St. John of the Cross regards cloistered life; consequently he explains the religious life as follows: *If it was not for this purpose, then there was no reason for entering the convent; it would have been better, in fact, to have remained in the world and sought its consolations, honor, and reputation and live in full liberty.*

18. Viewed in this way religious life, men and their shortcomings, are explained and all the difficulties disappear. Daily life even in its insignificant details becomes then a rich mine of great merits. What seemed intolerable defects in others are converted into excellent opportunities to practise heroic acts of virtue, and this without going out of the simple and ordinary life. Then as our holy Father says: *One benefits by*

*every incident.* St. Ignatius, martyr, provoked the wild beasts to destroy his body that his precious soul could soon enjoy its crown in heaven. Tender Christian virgins cherished the hand of the executioner, which was to sever the ties that kept back their beautiful souls from the presence of their Spouse, Jesus Christ. After their example let us suffer with resignation, and even joyfully, the unsympathetic character of those with whom we have to live, remembering that they afford us manifold occasions to acquire great merits.

19. Whoever preserves for years his heart resigned, amiable, and contented in the company of persons who, consciously or unconsciously, mortify him continually, will have no less merit before God than the martyr who offers his neck to the executioner. The former is a prolonged martyrdom of mind and heart. All those who are consecrated to God by a religious profession must aspire to this martyrdom. For this reason the religious state is called a prolonged martyrdom; and it is often those who are aiming at the same goal with ourselves, who will mortify us most. This is the genuine spirit of our Father St. John of the Cross. If any one doubts it, let him read and meditate again on the precautions of our saint. Where this spirit is not understood and practised, religious life is not understood, nor is it possible to acquire virtue, to preserve peace of heart and mind, or avoid many faults against

charity: *If you do not observe this, you will not know how to overcome your sensuality and feelings, nor will you know how to live as you ought in the convent with the religious, neither will you ever attain to holy peace, nor free yourself from many obstacles and evils.* Let us meditate assiduously on these words of our holy Father, and make constant efforts to put them into practice, then neither the devil nor our sensuality will ever disturb the sweet peace of our heart.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### EIGHTH PRECAUTION, THE SECOND AGAINST THE FLESH

1. WORDS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—2. MOTIVE OF HUMAN ACTIONS. PLEASURE IS A LAWFUL INCITEMENT.—3. TO ACT FOR THE SAKE OF PLEASURE IS DEGRADING.—4. GOD PUNISHES MEN BY ALLOWING THEM TO DO THEIR OWN WILL. MAN MUST BE GUIDED BY HIS REASON AND NOT BY PLEASURE.—5. FOLLY OF SPIRIT. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS THE MOST ABLE MASTER OF THE SPIRIT AND A DEEP PSYCHOLOGIST.—6. PLEASURE TAKEN IN CREATURES IS DEGRADING. THEY ARE CRUMBS FALLING FROM THE TABLE OF THE FATHER OF THE FAMILY.—7. EFFECTS OF PLEASURE. MOST BEAUTIFUL WORDS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—8. DESIRE FOR PLEASURE IS NEVER SATISFIED; IT MAKES EVERYTHING USELESS AND DARKENS THE MIND.—9. A SAFE RULE. WORTHY ANSWER OF A SAINT. DICTATES OF CONSCIENCE.
10. GREAT CHARACTERS.—11. CHILDISH MEN; THEY SUFFER MUCH.—12. THEY LOSE THE MERITS OF THEIR GOOD WORKS AND DESERVE SEVERE PUNISHMENT.—13. FIRST STIMULUS OF OUR ACTIONS. NAMES WRITTEN IN HEAVEN.—14. HOW TO BE USEFUL TO ALL AND TO ONESELF. SAINTS DO NOT IMPAIR HUMAN NATURE.—15. MORAL PRUNING.—16. THE PURE RECEIVE THE HUNDRED FOLD EVEN IN THIS LIFE.—17. THE LIFE OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS, A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF HIS TEACHING.

1. The second precaution is: *Never omit any practices, if they are conducive to the service of God, because you do not find any pleasure in them; neither observe them for the sake of the*



*pleasure you find in them, unless they are as necessary as those that are disagreeable. Otherwise you will find it impossible to acquire firmness and overcome your weakness.*

2. The principal motive of every human action, that which qualifies it and from which it derives its merit or its guilt, is the end or intention with which man performs a deliberate action. These intentions can be reduced to two classes, pleasure or duty. We never perform any action with full deliberation without intending to secure some pleasure or fulfil some duty of conscience. Pleasure is the lowest end, while the most noble is duty. Pleasure is not bad in itself. God Himself created it and attached it to the execution of nearly every human action, both corporal and spiritual, especially those that are more necessary to human society in general or to the life of each individual in particular. Providence, infinitely wise, bestows this pleasure, that man stimulated thereby may not fail in his duty.

But pleasure according to God's intention is only a stimulus, a means, and not the object. Therefore, he who performs his actions only for the sake of the pleasure he finds in them, will always act more or less disorderly. And as every disorder sooner or later redounds to the detriment of him who acts disorderly, pleasure is generally hurtful to men who seek it as the principal object of their actions.

3. To do something merely because it is pleasing, is a poor manner of acting. The brute beast has no other motive nor stimulus in its actions than instinct and pleasure. Moreover, such a manner of acting is dangerous, for the pleasure thus sought and satisfied creates effeminate habits which weaken man's will, replace human reason, and finally enslave and degrade him. This is well exemplified in the history of Solomon. He besought the Lord with much insistence and humility, not to give him what his eyes coveted and to deliver him from the desires of his heart. (1) The Lord heard his prayer and gifted his soul with great wisdom and prudence as well as surrounded him with riches and glory. But Solomon did not know how to deprive himself of anything that his eyes coveted or his heart desired. And so, notwithstanding his great prudence and his incomparable wisdom, he fell very soon into the most repugnant vices. He, who had erected and dedicated to the God of Israel the most magnificent temple in the world, also built temples to the idols of Chamos and Moloch and adored them. (2)

4. One of the greatest scourges that God can send to men and to nations is to let them go according to their pleasure. It was thus He punished the infidelity of the ancient peoples, as St.

(1) Ec. XXIII. 5.

(2) 3 Kings XI. 7.

Paul says: *Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart.* (3) After the same manner God chastised His chosen people: *My people heard not my voice; and Israel hearkened not to me. So I let them according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions.* (4) It is then most important that man should know how to conduct himself in actions whose pleasure may occasion so great evils. To regulate properly our natural inclination for all that is delectable, our holy Father gives us this precaution; he tells us that we must attach so very little importance to our tastes as never to omit any action, however disagreeable it may seem, provided it is for the service of God, nor that we perform any only for the pleasure we find in its execution. To do something merely for pleasure's sake, is not worthy of man who should be guided by the dictates of conscience. Irrational animals have no other stimulus for their actions than instinct or pleasure, and therefore the man who seeks in his actions nothing more than to satisfy his passions is rightly compared to brute beasts. And so the Holy Ghost warns us to be on our watch against men who *blaspheme whatever things they know not; what things soever they naturally know, like dumb beasts; in these they are corrupted.* (5) St. Paul

(3) Rom. I. 24.

(4) Ps. LXXX. 12, 13.

(5) Jude I. 10.

teaches the same: *The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him.* (6)

5. All who make pleasure the principal motive of their actions will soon lapse into this disgraceful folly of the spirit. St. John of the Cross is a perfect master in his exposition of this teaching. To teach us how to regulate well our natural inclination for pleasure, whether in the execution of our actions or in created things in general, he wrote, besides these precautions, his first and most extensive work. In the three books of the "Ascent of Mount Carmel" he marvelously expounds this doctrine. Pleasures or, as he calls them, affections of the senses, the heart, the mind, the memory, and the will; different objects in which man according to each of his faculties can take pleasure; the manifold evils that naturally result from their disorders; the great advantages that accrue from their perfect control: these form the subject matter of this admirable work.

His knowledge of the human soul as portrayed in the "Ascent" is astonishing. He studies all its movements and aims at elevating man to God; no nook or corner of the mind or heart of man escapes the searchlight of this keen observer. He has been rightly called the foremost psychologist of the world; nobody else ever gave so profound



and clear an explanation of the relations that exist between God and man. His language does not seem to be the language of man. No quotation of human genius appears in these admirable pages, whereas quotations from the Bible are found on almost every page. It seems as if the divine language of the Bible alone could be assimilated by this holy Doctor; and this is not strange when we consider his heavenly life and the divine teaching he gives us in these books. He tells us that we must place our affection in God alone: *for he who loves the creature becomes vile as the creature, and in one sense even viler, for love not only levels, but subjects also the lover to the object of his love. He therefore who loves anything beside God, renders his soul incapable of the divine union and of transformation in God.*

6. He tells us that to take pleasure in creatures is to lose our true liberty: *He who loves the indulgence of his desires, stands before God, not as a son who is free, but as a person of mean condition, the slave of his passions. . . And consequently such a one will never attain to the true liberty of spirit attainable in the divine union, because slavery has no fellowship with liberty; liberty dwelleth not in the heart subject to desires, for that heart is in captivity, but in that which is free, the heart of a son. (7).*

And then he explains how he who places his disorderly affection on creatures, is never satisfied; *because according to the words of the Gospel, all created things are but the crumbs which fall from the table of God. Thus they who go about feeding on creatures are rightly called dogs. These are always hungry like dogs, and justly so, because crumbs excite the appetite rather than appease hunger. They who gratify their desires are always morose and discontented like angry persons.* (8).

7. Several pages farther on explain how pleasures produce in the soul these five effects, to-wit: *They tire, and torment, and darken, and defile, and weaken it.* The gentle reader will surely not object to a lengthy passage from our Father, because it contains all that is related to this matter: *It is evident that the desires weary the soul, because they resemble little children, restless and dissatisfied, who are always begging of their mother, now one thing, now another; they are never content. As one given to covetousness fatigues himself digging for gold, so the soul wearies itself in the pursuit of those things which the desires demand and though he may obtain them, yet the end is weariness, because he is never satisfied; and after all they are broken cisterns, which can hold no waters to sat-*

isfy his thirst. And so Isaiah says: "Is yet faint with thirst, and his soul is empty." (8)

The soul which yields to its desires is weary and faint, like one ill of burning fever, never at rest, and whose thirst increases while the fever lasts; for as it is written in the book of Job: "When he shall be filled, he shall be straightened, he shall burn, and every sorrow shall fall upon him." Thus is it with the soul, wearied and afflicted by the desires; they wound it, agitate, and disturb it, as wind does water, harassing it, so that it can never repose on anything, or in any place.

Of such souls it is written, "The wicked are like the raging sea which cannot rest." The heart of the wicked is like the raging sea, and he is wicked who does not subdue his desires. That soul which seeks to satisfy them wearies and torments itself, and is like one who, in the pains of hunger, opens his mouth to be filled with the wind, and who, instead of being satisfied therewith, becomes still more hungry, for wind is not his meat and drink. And so such souls as Jeremiah saw: "In the desire of his heart, he snuffed up the wind of his love." . . . . As the ambitious man is wearied in the day of disappointed expectations, so the soul with its desires and their fulfillment, for they make it more empty and hungry than it was before. The desires are, as it is commonly said, like fire which burns when supplied with

*fuel, but which when the fuel is consumed, immediately dies out. In truth, the desire is in a much worse condition: the fire is quenched when the fuel fails, but the desire ceases not with the matter on which it fed while it raged, even though that be utterly consumed; for instead of ceasing, like the fire when the fuel is burned out, the desire pines away in weariness, for hunger is increased and food diminished. (9).*

8. The desires not only are a torment to him who did not know how to overcome them, but they are also a great danger, for he will go from bad to worse. What in the beginning seemed only a slight and innocent passion, just a little gratification one was pleased to take in objects not at all sinful, will, if it is neglected and fostered, soon cause in the soul the ravages mentioned by St. John of the Cross in the foregoing passage, and instead of a help they will become an impediment to our advancement on the road to perfection. As our holy Father continues: *How deplorable is the ignorance of some who burden themselves with indiscreet penances, and other imprudent methods of devotion—voluntary certainly—on which they rely, thinking such alone, without mortifying their desires in other matters, to be sufficient to lead them on to the union of divine wisdom. But this can never*



*be, if the desires are not diligently mortified. If these persons bestowed but half their labor on this, they would make greater progress in a month than they can now make in many years, if they persevere in their present ways. For as it is necessary to till the earth that it may bring forth fruit—for otherwise nothing will grow therein but weeds—so also is it necessary to mortify our desires, if we are to make progress toward perfection. Without mortification, I say it boldly, we shall make no progress toward perfection, nor in the knowledge of God and of ourselves notwithstanding all our efforts, any more than the seed will grow which is thrown away on uncultivated ground.*

*We are not to rely on a clear intellect, or on the gifts received from God, and then imagine that any affections or desires we may indulge in will not blind us, nor cause us to fall into a worse state little by little. Who would have thought that a man of perfect wisdom, filled with the gifts of God, as Solomon was, could have fallen away in his old age into such blindness and torpor of the will, as to build altars to so many idols and worship them? (10).*

9. The only way to avoid all these evils is to fulfil perfectly the precaution of St. John of the Cross; we must accustom ourselves to overlook the pleasure or displeasure we may find in the

execution of our works. We must not perform them because we like them, nor leave them undone because we dislike them. Desires should not intervene at all in the actions of persons consecrated to God. A superior once questioned a religious whether he would like to go to a certain place; the excellent religious answered: *I beg your Reverence not to ask what I like; but tell me what I have to do.* Behold an answer worthy of a saint!

To pay no attention whether the orders of our superior or the prescriptions of our rules are agreeable or disagreeable, but simply to perform them because our duty demands it, this requires great virtue and energy of character; and more especially when there is question of ordinary and humble actions which of themselves do not bring with them fame and glory. Those actions which honor us or bring with them fame and glory, naturally attract the desire of man to be known and honored. Such actions however are few, and there is seldom occasion to perform them; whereas the former fill almost all our life and that of the greater part of men. In them there is nothing to entice nature that will oblige us to perform them. Therefore to perform them promptly, with perfection and contentment, attending only to duty, supposes a very great fidelity to the dictates of conscience. This requires such heroic effort against the strongest inclinations of nature, that only great and firm charac-

ters or persons far advanced in perfection will be able to sustain the conflict.

10. It is no trifle indeed to practise constantly what is little, merely matter of routine, or displeasing to poor human nature, and at the same time hold always the spirit aloft with a heart so strong as never to weary or faint. Here where they are least seen are to be found the greatest characters and the holiest souls. Nobody has become perfect in the midst of the clamor and pursuit of worldly affairs. Great hearts have always been trained in a long life of humility and abnegation. Every one of them passed this way before being admired by the world. We have seen the Son of God walking this road, expending eighteen years of His life in the solitude of Nazareth, laboring in the humble work-shop of a poor carpenter, and his Holy Mother engaged in a thousand little domestic occupations. Those imitate Jesus and Mary who in all their actions seek before everything else the fulfilment of duty; here lies the secret of the will-power and the peace of heart we admire so much in persons of heroic virtue.

11. But in those who seek in their actions the satisfaction of their desires or vain glory, who prefer what is more in accordance with their whims and avoid as much as they can what is disagreeable to their senses; such people behave like children for they do not yet enjoy the perfect use of reason, nor can they act always for

the sake of conscience; they are moved solely by the pleasure they experience in their actions. The habit of acting for pleasure only increases selfishness, fosters pride, and makes man hard-hearted.

Those who never perform anything without seeking their own satisfaction, notwithstanding their habitual haughtiness, are most unfortunate. They have no character, nor can they for any length of time enjoy the principal motive of their actions, the satisfaction of their desires. What is agreeable now, suddenly becomes distasteful, and what appears honorable to-day, to-morrow will be dishonorable and even disgraceful. For this reason no self-seeker possesses any stability or firmness; his character is as changeable as his selfishness and his inconstancy.

Pleasure is a bad counsellor on which we can seldom rely. Therefore St. John of the Cross warns us: *Remember that your guardian angel does not always move the will to act, though he always enlightens your mind; therefore do not promise yourself sensible sweetness always in your works, because reason and understanding are enough.* (11). Let our reason and conscience therefore be the only promoters of our actions, the more so, since those who occupy themselves much in attending to their whims also suffer very much; for as St. John of the Cross tells us, the



appetites are never satisfied, and the more they are cared for, the more do they mortify and torment us. Then man does not regulate his desires and pleasures, but he is ruled and mastered by them; therefore he says in another place: *Without this—without forgetting your tastes and pleasures—it is impossible to obtain constancy and to overcome your weakness. And again: Whenever you gratify your self-will a two-fold bitterness will follow; do not then desire to gratify it in anything.* (12).

12. On the other hand, whoever seeks his satisfaction in his works, loses the merit of them before God. The gratification of his desires has been the only reward of his works; when he goes before God, the Lord will say to him: *Thou hast received thy reward. Thou has performed indeed some good works but thou has not done them principally for Me, though thy lips said so, but not thy heart. Thou hast performed some works of charity, but thou hast sought gratitude for them. Thou hast spoken well of Me, but here also thou hast sought thy own glory; and even in thy devotions and religious actions thou hast been more solicitous to satisfy thy sensible pleasure than to do my will.*

We not only lose the merit of our good works when we take a vain complacency in them, but the Lord is wont to punish us with terrible chas-

tisements of displeasure and sorrow; and hence St. John of the Cross says: *It is therefore justly to be feared, whenever we rejoice in vanity, that God is looking on and preparing some chastisement for us, the bitter cup of our deservings; for the punishment of rejoicing is frequently greater than its pleasures.* (13).

13. Not to lose our time miserably even in the performance of those works that seem to be the best, let us observe carefully this precaution, let the desire of pleasing God be the primary motive-power of all our actions. For as the saint says in another place: *The spiritual man must be very careful of the beginning of joy in temporal things, lest it should grow from little to great, and increase from one degree to another. The spiritual man, therefore, must suppress the first motions of this joy, keeping this in mind that there is nothing in which a man may rejoice except in serving God, in promoting His honor and glory, in directing all things to this end, in avoiding therein all vanity and not seeking his own comfort and pleasure in them.* (14). We have a most beautiful example of this in the holy Gospel. Our Lord sent His seventy-two disciples to preach through the cities whither He Himself was to come, and said to them: *Go; Behold I send you as lambs among wolves.* They, having fulfilled

(13) III. Ascent, XIX. 6.

(14) III. Ascent, XIX.

their mission, returned with joy saying: *Lord, the devils also are subject to us in Thy name.* They were satisfied with the first fruits of their mission. But the Lord wished to regulate the joy of those good men and to raise it higher; therefore He said gently: *I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven. Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpent and scorpion, and upon all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. But yet rejoice not in this, that spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven.* (15). Our Divine Redeemer did not wish His beloved disciples to take complacency even in the miracles they performed in His name. He bade them to rejoice only because their names were written in heaven. In this and in the glory of God and the salvation of souls we must glory.

14. If we observe this doctrine faithfully, we shall have full control over all our natural inclinations, we shall enjoy deep peace of soul, and our most trivial actions will give much glory to God, and obtain great merit for ourselves and be useful to many. Therefore our holy Father says: *The most delicate flower is the first to wither and to lose its fragrance; therefore take care you do not walk by the way of spiritual sweetness, for you will never be constant. Choose rather a robust spirit, not attached to anything,*

*and you will find sweetness and abundance of peace. Savory, sweet lasting fruit is found only in a dry and cold soil. (16).*

If this great master of the spirit seeks to deprive souls of all tastes and pleasures, not only of the illicit, but also of what is permitted good people, it is certainly not to deaden or stupify all their faculties. To harbor such a thought of the saints and especially of St. John of the Cross would be derogatory to them. It would make them unacceptable and even repulsive to every correct and sincere man. It would be to attribute to them the intent of mutilating human nature. But God is their witness, the saints are not so. They did not pretend nor practise any such thing, nor teach the same to others. How much less could this be the case with St. John of the Cross, whose soul was particularly enriched with delicate and sublime sentiments.

15. The farmer mercilessly prunes the trees and leaves them in a pitiable condition. It is certainly not to quench the sap, but that being well directed, it may produce more abundant flowers and fruit. This is also the intention of this great master of the human spirit, which he apparently mutilates without mercy. He consecrates a monumental work, or rather all His monumental works, to teach us how we should deprive each of our faculties and senses of things



which seem to be most expedient to them. In his invaluable treatises of the "Ascent of Mount Carmel" and of the "Dark Night of the Sense" and the "Dark Night of the Spirit," he thoroughly and wisely analyzes all the movements of the soul, to recommend to us in the strongest terms the abnegation of our faculties and senses.

It is certain that if the reader does not understand well the mind of the saint, he will experience a sensation of estrangement and discouragement; and this notwithstanding the incomparable beauties of style that are apparent in all these pages as well as the irresistible charm of so many delicate and profound thoughts of this thinker *a lo divino*. The reader must remember that the saint does not intend to stifle or deaden any one of our legitimate faculties. On the contrary he wants to purify them from a thousand imperfections contracted in this world; and once purified, to develop themselves that, even here below man may with the assistance of divine grace, begin to manifest all the moral and intellectual beauties of which God has made him capable.

16. Let us finish this long chapter with another passage of our holy Father where he clearly lays down his teaching of abnegation:

*The second spiritual benefit of not rejoicing in sensible goods is great; and we may say of a truth, that the sensual becomes spiritual, the animal rational, that man leads an angelical life, that*

*the temporal and the human become heavenly and divine. As the man who seeks for pleasure in sensual things and founds all his joy upon them, ought not and deserves not to be called by any other name than this, namely sensual and animal; so the man whose joy is beyond them deserves the name of spiritual and heavenly. (17). This is the end of so much abnegation. He will now show us how each faculty and each sense, already purified, commence to enjoy even in this life their objects in a most wonderful manner. But the third fruit of this absolute abnegation is the great increase of the joys and pleasures of the will in this life; for as our Saviour said: "They shall receive a hundred fold." Matt. xix, 29. If you will deny yourself one joy, our Lord will reward you a hundred fold spiritually and temporally in this world; for one joy indulged in sensible goods, you will have a hundred sorrows and afflictions. As to the eye, now purged from all joy in seeing, the soul receives joy, directed to God, in all that is seen, whether human or divine. As to the ear, purged from all joy in hearing, the soul receives joy a hundred fold, and that most spiritual, directed to God in all that is heard whether human or divine. The same observation applies to the other senses. For as all that our first parents said and did in the state of innocence in paradise, furnished them with means of*

*sweet contemplation, because their sensual nature was ordered by and subject unto reason, so he also whose senses are subject to the spirit and purged from all sensible objects in their first motions, elicits the delight of sweet knowledge and contemplation of God.*

*To the pure, therefore, high things and low are profitable, and minister to his greater purity; while both the one and the other are occasions of greater evil to the impure. But he who does not repress the satisfaction of his appetites, will never enjoy the ordinary tranquillity of rejoicing in God, through the instrumentality of His creatures and His work. . . . On the other hand, he who is pure of heart, finds in all things that knowledge of God which is delicious, sweet, chaste, pure, spiritual, joyous, and loving. (18).*

17. All the life of our holy Father was a practical demonstration of this admirable teaching. Although nobody was more austere than he in his practices, yet nobody could equal him in sweetness of spirit and gentleness of character. He sought abnegation for his senses and faculties only, and nevertheless very few souls, if any, were so full of intimate joy in God which was apparent in all his words and works. Because his soul was continually overflowing with divine joys, he wrote such deep thoughts with such gentle words, that nobody in the Spanish language

nor in any other language has ever surpassed him. He could say with the Apostle: "*With Christ I am nailed to the Cross.*" But in the midst of my tribulations I am full of consolation and supreme joy: "*For to me to live is Christ; and to die is gain.*" (19).

But we should never end, if we wish to copy every charming passage of our holy Father. Let us paraphrase the last of his precautions, for it needs no commentary.

(19) Phil. VIII. 12.



## CHAPTER XIX

### NINTH PRECAUTION AND THE THIRD AGAINST THE FLESH

1. WORDS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—2. TO PREFER SORROW TO PLEASURE.—3. THE MAN WHO ALWAYS CONTROLS HIS SORROWS IS VERY GREAT.—4. HOW SUFFERING CAN BE CHERISHED.—5. SUFFERING EXPIATES.—6. IT PURIFIES AND ADORNS. IT IS PURGATORY IN THIS LIFE AND A GREAT BLESSING OF GOD.—7. SUFFERING OBTAINS ALL THINGS FROM GOD. POWER OF TEARS.—8. SUFFERING RENDERS US LIKE OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.—9. THE CROSS IS THE SYMBOL OF SUFFERING THROUGH LOVE.—10. INSTRUCTIONS ON SUFFERING GIVEN BY OUR LORD TO ST. TERESA OF JESUS.—11. TO SUFFER OR TO DIE. THE SAINTS AND SUFFERINGS.—12. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SAINTS AND OF WORLDLY PERSONS.—13. PERSONS CONSECRATED TO GOD SHOULD NEITHER IGNORE NOR DISLIKE SUFFERINGS.—14. FIRST CLASS OF SUFFERINGS.—15. SECOND CLASS.—16. VOLUNTARY SUFFERINGS.—17. WORDS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.

1. *Let the third precaution be that in all your spiritual exercises you will never fix your attention on the sweetness of them nor attach yourself to it, but rather on that which is difficult and painful, and accept it. If you do, you will never destroy self-love, nor acquire the love of God.*

2. The great ascetic of Carmel is not satisfied with what he recommended in the last precaution, that we do not attach ourselves to the pleasure we may find in the execution of our spiritual exercises. In the present precaution he wants us to prefer what is difficult and painful to what is delightful and easy; and not only to accept it with resignation, but also to cherish and embrace it, as something that is loved and appreciated. This is the remarkable teaching of this most tender lover of the Cross. These are the first lessons he gives those who wish to follow his doctrine. He begins counselling the soul which is about to ascend the first steps of the mystical mountain of perfection, that *every satisfaction offered to the senses, which is not for God's honor and glory, must be renounced and rejected for the love of Jesus Christ, who in this life had sought no other pleasure than doing the will of His Father, which was His meat, as He tells us Himself. For instance, if the pleasure of listening to anything which tends not to the service of God presents itself, seek not that pleasure, neither give ear to what is said. If you are offered the sight, pleasurable in itself, of things which do not lead you nearer to God, seek not that pleasure, and abstain from that sight. Do the same also in conversation and every other commerce of society. Practise the same mortification with respect to the other senses as far as possible. (1).*

This is in connection with the corporal senses, and in the same way our holy Father wishes to regulate the affections of the soul; for this purpose he gives the following celebrated maxim: *Strive always not after that which is most easy, but after that which is most difficult.*

*Not after that which is most pleasant, but after that which is most unpleasant.*

*Not after that which giveth pleasure, but after that which giveth none.*

*Not after that which is consoling, but after that which is afflictive.*

*Not after that which ministers repose, but after that which ministers labor.*

*Not after great things, but after little things.*

*Not after that which is higher and precious, but after that which is lower and despised.*

*Strive not to desire anything, but rather nothing.*

*Seek not after that which is better, but after that which is worse, and desire to be detached from all things, empty and poor for Christ's sake. This state is to be embraced with a perfect heart, and the will must conform thereto. Because if our heart be truly engaged in these efforts, we shall in a short time attain to great joy and consolation therein, doing our work orderly and with discretion. (2).*

According to this ascetic doctrine, of which the last precaution is the synthesis, we should prefer always and everywhere what is difficult to what is easy; what is unpleasant, laborious, and troublesome, to what is pleasant, easy, and consoling; what depresses and humbles us, to all that can honor and exalt us. He wants finally that whenever the choice is left us, we elect what will mortify and humble us and leave to others what will please and honor.

3. This doctrine is the highest recommendation of suffering in whatsoever form it comes to us, physical or moral, corporal or spiritual. To bear sufferings with dignified patience and fortitude when they are inevitable, and to face them manly when they come between us and our duty, should be, it seems, sufficient for virtue. That man is truly great and often performs real wonders, whom no difficulty, hindrance or hardship can withdraw from his duties, and who proves himself so superior to suffering, that he executes promptly and cheerfully the most ordinary actions in life. Whoever on account of suffering does not lose his peace and cheerfulness of heart nor his energy of mind, is really a superior soul, since suffering renders ordinary persons remiss in the fulfilment of their daily duties. It seems then that virtue should not exact from us more than that we rise superior to all hardships and suffering.



4. But this does not satisfy St. John of the Cross. He wants us to entertain a real preference for suffering; he wants us to seek and embrace it as a cherished object is sought and embraced. But to cherish and embrace suffering and pain seems against nature itself. Of whatever kind it may be, pain is always a want of something apprehended as good, or something that the sufferer esteems expedient for himself. And therefore St. Thomas Aquinas says, that pain is an evil to the sufferer. (3).

But as the same holy Doctor remarks, suffering though in itself an evil for the one enduring it, is very often the cause of great benefits; and in this sense it can be highly cherished and loved by those who understand its mission. A patient finds a drug very disgusting and bitter, and nevertheless he desires to take it, because he believes that bitter medicine will restore his lost health, just as another patient smiles at the surgeon who is going to amputate one of his limbs, because he believes it necessary to lose a member of his body to save his life. The same happens with suffering. No saint ever declared that a physical or moral suffering was in itself a desirable good. They loved suffering and recommended it to us as the cause of great advantages, which may be reduced to the four following groups.

(3) II. Q. XXXIX. a. 1.

5. First: Suffering expiates or sanctifies. For every disorder committed to satisfy any of our tastes or desires we contract a debt due to justice. The greater the debt, the more intense was the disorderly pleasure. Therefore we read in the Apocalypse: *As much as she hath glorified herself, and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her.* (4). And this must be understood not only of great disorders, but also of that multitude of apparently insignificant faults which are so easily committed in our daily life. Very often we fail in minor duties, now to take some trifling pleasure, then to avoid certain hardships. And for each of these disorders however small, we contract a proportionate debt of suffering or pain, for our Divine Redeemer tells us that on the great day of reckoning we all have to render an account for even the smallest pleasure we have taken in uttering an idle word. (5).

The life of every man, however orderly it may seem, is full of these little responsibilities. Therefore David said: *Evils without number have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I was not able to see.* (6). None of these will go unpunished by divine justice: *Every one of us shall render account to God for himself.* (7); and

(4) Apoc. XVII. 7.

(5) Matt. XII. 36.

(6) Ps. XXXIX. 13.

(7) Rom. XIV. 12.

*fire shall try every man's work.* (8). For every disorderly affection, however light, we have to pass through the fire of patient love here on earth, or through the consuming fire in the next world. If man does not purify himself in this life by voluntary penance; by accepting and supporting with resignation a suffering proportionate to his disorderly pleasures; a terrible justice will purify him afterwards, according to Ecclesiasticus: *If we do not penance; we shall fall into the hands of the Lord.* (9). It is incomparably easier to purify ourselves here than in the next world. Because here our sufferings are voluntary and free, and the Lord—ininitely good—overlooks the sins of men for the sake of a little sincere penance. Therefore our Divine Redeemer says: *When thou goest with thy adversary to the prince, whilst thou art in the way, endeavor to be delivered from him; lest perhaps he draw thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the exacter, and the exacter cast thee into prison. I say to thee thou shalt not go out from thence, until thou pay the very last mite.* (10).

It is true that our Lord satisfied for the sins of the world; but it is also true what St. Paul said to the Colossians: *I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting in*

(8) Cor. III-13.

(9) Eccl. II. 22.

(10) Luke XII. 58, 59.

*the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh.* (11). It is evident that nothing except our co-operation is wanting to the sufferings of our Lord that they may be applied to us. Sufferings may also be cherished, because by bearing them with loving patience they contain a great expiatory power. For this reason those who understand the value of suffering and who desire to appease divine justice offended by their sins, carefully seek and lovingly embrace all manner of suffering.

6. Second: All pleasure more or less sinful, not only renders the soul a debtor to the divine justice but also deforms and weakens it. The effects of the first disorderly affection admitted by Adam still remain in human nature, which has been profoundly impoverished and deformed, and unfortunately each one of us with our personal disorders increases the primitive deformity within us.

Here, for instance, is a person in the conscious possession of youth and beauty, enjoying both talent and grace; goodness and faith add to his natural charms, his conversation delights and helps the soul to raise its thoughts to higher regions. But let us continue our attentive observation of this fortunate individual. If suffering in some shape or other does not come to his help, he will not be able to maintain himself on those heights. Enjoying so much and not suffering lovingly he will nec-



essarily deteriorate notwithstanding his enchanting gifts. Observe him after some time, and you will see that he no longer attracts or satisfies, because over and above these gifts there is noticed something that is not pleasing. And the closer you study him, the more you will notice something that renders him repulsive notwithstanding his many charms; he attracts and repels at the same time. The reason is that in this world the pleasure which is not sustained by suffering worthily borne, creates and fosters selfishness and pride. These vices, which are never long alone, of their own nature weaken and miserably deform a person.

On the contrary, let us fix our attention on those persons whom suffering has tried, without ever discouraging them. Some are so generous that the more they are afflicted on earth, with the greater affection they look up to heaven; suffering helps them to expand and intensify their patience and love. Their natural gifts are preserved much longer, for they gradually transform them into others more beautiful and perfect. When the sun disappears from the horizon, it leaves the twilight to illumine the mountains and the sky, a sight that produces such deep and ineffable sentiments in pure and refined natures. When suffering visits a soul that understands the meaning of pain and lovingly bears it, although it deprives it of many pleasures, it provides others far better and of a higher nature; for suffering frees the soul from selfishness, purifies it from the effects of every dis-

orderly passion, and enables it to love others with a deeper purity and honor, with liberty of spirit and perfection, thus imitating in some degree the blessed in heaven.

But no person reaches such heights without having suffered and wept much. Suffering and love are the two wings that elevate the soul in this life; while enjoyment without suffering, stupifies; and suffering without love, embitters and degrades. Suffering sweetened and sustained by love is the necessary element to purify and embellish souls; and if they are not thus purified in this world, they will have to be purified in the next. Therefore St. John of the Cross wishes that the chosen souls of God suffer their purgatory in this world through the *dark night of loving fire*, as he styles it.

Purgatory has for its object the purification of souls from the stains left by sin. Once the effects of sin have been removed, the fire of purgatory can have no more power over them; it cannot in the least molest them, even if they were in the midst of the devouring flames: *For the fire would have no power over them if they were perfectly prepared for the kingdom of God and union with Him in glory, and if they have no faults for which they must suffer, for these are the matter on which that fire seizes; when the matter is consumed there is nothing more to burn. So it is here, when all imperfections are removed the suf-*

*fering of the soul ceases, and in its place comes joy as deep as it is possible in this life. (12).*

Consequently, it is a very great blessing of God for the valiant soul that can suffer its purification in this world; it shortens its purgatory and reaches to such a purity in this life through this loving fire, that the fire of purgatory can have no power over it. Let us listen again to our holy Father: *As the dark and material fires in the next life, so the loving, dark, and spiritual fires here, purify and cleanse the predestinate. The difference is that in the next world they are purified by fire, and here, purified and enlightened by love. (13).* With this exalted idea of suffering, it is not strange that the saints were so anxious to suffer.

7. Third. The imperative power of suffering. Rightly has it been said that there is nothing in the moral order so powerful as tears; when they are sincere—and it is difficult to counterfeit them—they are the language of a soul that loves and suffers. For those who suffer without love, do not weep but ordinarily blaspheme. And this language of tears, when it is sincere, has such power of insinuation that there are few good people who can resist. God has willed that the heart should naturally yield before supplicating and patient suffering, and especially when it is also affection-

(12) II Dark Night X.

(13) Dark Night XII. 1.

ate. What a smile cannot obtain tears can. And what is not given to one who asks smilingly, is granted to another who begs with tears.

It is the same with God. He wishes us to know His inclination through the goodness we find in the human heart. He declares that He delights to be with the sufferer whom He denies nothing when he approaches Him: *Because thy heart was softened and wept before me: I also have heard thee, said the Lord.* (14).

Solomon says: *Though in the sight of men they suffered torments, their hope is full of immortality.* (15) And St. Paul exclaims joyfully: *For which cause I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed. For I know whom I have believed.* (16). Our Lord proclaimed blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those that hunger and thirst after justice, those that suffer persecution for justice sake, those that are reviled and outraged; in fact all those who suffer. He promised splendid rewards for each suffering borne with resignation. In Ecclesiasticus He offers special blessings to those who are merciful with the sufferer: *Deliver him that suffereth wrong out of the hand of the proud; and thou shalt be as the*

(14) II Paralip. XXXIV. 27.

(15) Wisd. III. 4.

(16) 2 Tim. I. 12.



*obedient son of the Most High, and He will have mercy on thee more than a mother. (17).*

Almost all the miracles narrated in the holy Gospel were wrought through the compassion our Lord felt for the sufferers. A desolate widow who accompanies her only son to the grave; a tender and affectionate father who weeps over his dead daughter; two bereaved sisters who mourn inconsolably over the grave of their brother. These three great sorrows moved the tender Heart of Christ to perform the three great miracles of restoring life to the dead, because God never slights the groanings of a trusting, pure, and loving heart. He is almighty but He is overcome by the weak sufferer. Therefore He tells us by His Prophet: *The mountains shall be moved and the hills shall tremble; but my mercy shall not depart from thee, O poor little one, tossed with tempest, without all comfort. (18).*

Nothing is so efficacious with God as suffering borne with love.

8. Suffering renders us like our Lord Jesus Christ, for according to St. Paul, God admits to His glory those who are made conformable to the image of His Son. (19). And this likeness must be in suffering; for it is Christ Himself Who said to all: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily,*

(17) Eccl. IV. 9, 10.

(18) Isaias LIV. 10.

(19) Rom. VIII. 9.

*and follow me. (20). For he that taketh not up his cross and followeth me, is not worthy of me. (21). Behold why the saints considered it a special grace to be able to suffer something for Christ; as St. Paul said to the Philippians: Unto you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him. (22).*

For men of great faith this life is of value only inasmuch as they can suffer for God, a favor not granted to the blessed in heaven. This same thought is beautifully expressed by St. John of the Cross: *Desire to become somewhat similar to this, our great God, who was humbled and crucified for us, because our life here is not good if we do not imitate Him. What does he know who does not know how to suffer for Christ? When there is question of sufferings, the greater and the more painful they are, the greater is the good fortune of him who suffers. (23).*

9. Our Lord Jesus Christ was raised on the Cross to redeem the world with a love so infinite and with sufferings so bitter that no man will ever fathom them; since then the cross is the symbol of love and of suffering, and hence its irresistible attraction for the saints. St. Paul wept to think that there were still enemies of the cross of Christ (24), and only in the cross would he admit

(20) Luke IX. 23.

(21) Matt. X. 38.

(22) Phil. I. 29.

(23) Max. 85, 86.

(24) Phil. III. 18.

glory and joy: *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.* (25). Our Father St. John of the Cross did not know how to live without the cross; so he wrote to one of his spiritual children: *It is expedient that like our Beloved the cross never fail us until we die the death of love. He regulates our passions or sufferings according to our love of what we must esteem, that we may offer greater sacrifices and be worthy of still more.* (26). He calls the cross the pilgrim's staff necessary to walk with ease and comfort on the road of life; the arms with which we have to conquer our enemies; the tree of life under which Jesus espoused human nature, and now espouses the souls that love Him.

10. In confirmation of all this let us recall again that most beautiful instruction given by our Lord to His favorite daughter, our Mother St. Teresa of Jesus: *Dost thou think, daughter, that merit consists in enjoying? It consists only in acting, suffering, and loving. Thou hast never heard that St. Paul enjoyed heavenly joys more than once, while he suffered many times: Thou seest how my whole life was full of suffering; only on Mount Tabor hast thou heard of me in glory. Do not suppose when thou seest My*

(25) Gal. VI. 14.

(26) Letter 10.

*Mother holding Me in her arms, that she enjoyed that happiness unmixed with heavy sorrows. From the time she heard Simeon speak to her My Father gave her full knowledge of what I was to suffer. The great saints who lived in the desert, as they were guided by God, so also did they perform their great penances, and moreover they waged serious war with the devil and with themselves; and they passed many days without any spiritual consolation whatever. Believe Me, My Daughter, how can I show thee greater love than by desiring for thee what I desired for Myself? Consider these wounds, thy sufferings will never reach so far. This is the way of truth; thus shalt thou help me to mourn over the ruin of those who are in the world; for thou knowest how all their desires, cares, and thoughts tend to the contrary. . . . Behold now the reward of suffering, as thou on account of thy health wert not able to speak to Me, I have spoken to thee and consoled thee. (27).*

11. Having been so divinely instructed, it is not strange that St. Teresa could not live without suffering. Hence her beautiful motto: *To suffer or to die*. With such a high idea of suffering it is easy to understand the vehement desires of the saints for sufferings. They feared the justice of God, not so much for themselves as for others, whom they, because they were saints,



loved most sincerely; and they knew that through suffering it was easy to satisfy and appease divine justice. They deplored most bitterly the deformity sin leaves on the soul, while they realized the great power of suffering to purify souls, and to obtain the divine blessings they felt were necessary. And lastly they were not ignorant that man's greatest glory consists in the perfect imitation of Christ, the *Man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity* (28), which resemblance will not be accomplished in heaven if it is not commenced and continued here on earth.

12. The saints were therefore thoroughly opposed to the thoughts and desires of the world; they cordially loved suffering and sought eagerly what the world hates and avoids by all means; they esteemed as wise, honorable, and happy what men consider madness, disgrace, and ignominy. This high esteem of suffering easily explains how all that the saints and men of great faith did was logical and harmonious in them, their thoughts, words, and deeds. It likewise explains the thoughts and actions of worldings, whose point of view is directly opposed to that of the saints.

13. We who have the honor of having consecrated ourselves to God, and who have been so many times at the feet of the Savior, we can not plead ignorance of the great mystery of suf-

(28) Isaiās LIII. 3.

fering nor of the wonderful graces God has concealed under suffering; neither can we refuse to accept what is so repugnant to our poor human nature, we who took the resolution of bearing them patiently when we embraced the religious state. To go back even in affection would be cowardice, and moreover an injury to the Divine Savior who first trod the thorny road of suffering, besides losing our eternal reward for Jesus Christ has already said to us: *No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.* (29). And again: *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.* (30). The road which leads to heaven is very narrow and rugged and if we do not wish to slip, to fatigue through discouragement, it is necessary to lean upon the staff of suffering and mortification.

Now we can perfectly understand why our holy Father says that it is not enough to bear patiently what is bitter and distasteful, and is perhaps an impediment in meeting our obligations, but we ought to seek what is hard and painful and to embrace it as expedient for overcoming sensuality; otherwise we shall not conquer self-love nor obtain the love of God. If we fulfil with ordinary care and great fidelity this precaution, we shall soon reach a very high perfection. For

(29) Luke IX. 26.

(30) Matt. XI. 12.

the sake of greater clearness we shall now summarize all that has been said in this chapter and reduce to three points whatever sufferings or hardships we may experience.

14. First of all those which are directly imposed by our state of life. Second. Those that are the results of the personal circumstances of each one. Third. Those that depend on our free will.

To the first class belong all the hardships entailed by the fulfilment of the rule and the obedience due superiors. Such are fasts, penances, retired life, abnegation of the will and the judgment, a thousand privations, long hours of prayer, etc., all these are part of the religious state. Each one must well understand this and therefore frequently meditate upon his obligations before he binds himself by vow to any religious institution. Nobody can dispense himself from fulfilling all the duties inherent to his profession, except in particular cases and by legitimate authority, for however hard the obligations may be they are inherent to his vocation. Consequently, whoever would try to avoid these hardships, would betray signs of weakness in his vocation.

If they displease him from the outset, why did he bind himself by vow to observe them? If at first they seemed excellent, why does he now esteem them so trifling, that rather than suffer a little inconvenience he abandons his duty? To him could be addressed the words of St. Paul to

the Galatians: *Are you so foolish, that, whereas you began in spirit, you would now be made perfect by the flesh?* (31). The first degree of mortification must consist then in accepting all those vexations and hardships which come directly from the observance of the rule. Whoever is habitually negligent in this, and tries for specious reasons to escape such obligations as assistance at prayer, etc., such a one is worthy of our sincere pity. He has not climbed one single step of the high mountain of religious perfection. These precautions cannot be applied to him, for our holy Father addresses himself to religious determined to ascend the rugged path of religious perfection. It is evident that those who do not try to observe the mere letter of the law, have not yet begun to mount in spirit the mystic Carmel; they will hear those terrible words mentioned above: “If you did not come to fulfil carefully the obligations of your profession, *there was no reason to enter the Order; you should rather have remained in the world seeking its pleasures, honor and reputation and full liberty.*”

15. To the second class of sufferings belong all those hardships that do not depend on our own will nor directly on the rule of our institute, but are due to the circumstances in which we are placed; like sickness, inconveniences of place, occupation, etc. These different circumstances often

(31) Gal. III. 3.



provide us with a very useful kind of penance. Without failing against the letter of the rule, we may try to avoid some of them, especially those that depend on superiors for a dispensation, at least partially; thus trying to obtain an occupation which pleases us in place of one that is displeasing, or obtain a transfer to another place, etc.

The last precaution of St. John of the Cross is an excellent remedy in all these cases. It is proper never to refuse any hardships which present themselves, but to accept them with a generous heart. The soul resigned to take whatever hardships it meets on the way, cuts off every selfish inclination and if it perseveres in the face of contradictions, will soon reach the highest summit of the mount of perfection.

16. It is clear then that he is most fortunate who has lost the fear of suffering, and who knowing and understanding its inestimable value, loves and seeks it, especially those sufferings that are of a spiritual and moral nature; the harder the blows against pride and selfishness the better, provided courage does not fail. This is a most excellent penance and highly recommended by our holy Father in his precaution, when he bids us seek what is most irksome in all things and this especially in spiritual and moral things. Corporal penance is good, and particularly that which the rule commands. To seek other voluntary penances may be a little dangerous; the blows against

self-love are never so, on the contrary, they are very useful to body and soul. The person who bears them without discouragement and bitterness is admirable, whereas he who has advanced so far as to desire and seek them, belongs to the family of saints; because suffering generously borne and even coveted, possesses a wonderful ascending power.

To such persons suffering is sweet and profitable, because suffering enables them to go more deeply into the thicket of the wisdom of God and because acute suffering brings an intimate and clear understanding. If we but once understood how impossible it is to reach the wisdom of the manifold riches of God, without passing through the thicket of interior and exterior suffering in which the soul places its consolation and therefore desires it, thereby to enter into the treasures of wisdom whose door is the cross. This explains why so few desire to enter, although many desire the delights of these treasures of wisdom.

17. How can we better conclude this commentary than by transcribing a page which contains a complete synthesis of the admirable ascetic teaching of this great lover of the cross and most wisemaster of the spirit. Commenting on that passage of the Gospel in which our Lord says: *If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever shall*

lose his life for my sake and the Gospel, shall save it. (32). St. John of the Cross writes: *O that some one would teach us how to understand, practise, and feel what is involved in this profound lesson of self-denial given us by our Lord Himself, that spiritual persons may perceive how different, on this road, their conduct ought to be from that which many of them think to be right! Some consider that any kind of retirement from the world, and correction of excesses to be sufficient; others content with a certain degree of virtue, persevere in prayer and the practice of mortification, but they do not rise to this detachment and poverty, or self-denial, or spiritual pureness. . . . They think it enough to deny themselves in the things of this world, without annihilating themselves, and purging away all self-seeking in spiritual things. Hence, it comes to pass that when any of this solid devotion presents itself to them, which consists in the annihilation of all sweetness in God, in dryness, in distaste, in trouble, which is the real spiritual cross, and the nakedness of the spiritual poverty of Christ, they run away from it as from death itself. . . . They render themselves spiritually enemies of the cross of Christ, for true spirituality seeks for bitterness rather than sweetness in God, inclines to suffering more than to consolation, and to be in want of everything for God rather than to pos-*

(32) Mark VIII. 34, 35.

*sess; this is to love God.* (33). Truly our Lord Jesus Christ is very little known even by those who consider themselves to be His friends. God grant that the assiduous reading of the works of this great lover of suffering may awaken in our souls the love of the Redeemer and His cross. Let us read them frequently and assiduously meditate on them; and though our virtue may not reach so high as to cause us to desire and seek suffering, we shall however obtain a little more strength to bear with resignation and merit at least those sufferings that cannot be avoided.

(33) II. Ascent VI.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE PRECAUTIONS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND THE SPIRIT OF CARMEL

1. PROVIDENTIAL MISSION OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS.—2. THESE PRECAUTIONS CONTAIN HIS FUNDAMENTAL AND GENERAL DOCTRINE.—3. HE DOES NOT CONSIDER THEM MERE COUNSELS, BUT PRECEPTS TO BE OBSERVED. THEY ARE THE GENUINE EXPRESSION OF THE SPIRIT OF CARMEL.—4. THE SPIRIT OF A CONGREGATION IS EMBODIED IN ITS FOUNDERS. THAT OF ELIAS SWEET AND AUSTERE. CONTINUOUS PRAYER AND GREAT ENTERPRISE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.—5. CARMELITE SKETCHES.—6. ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND ST. TERESA HAVE THE SAME SPIRIT, THOUGH IT MAY NOT BE APPARENT. THE WORLD DOES NOT UNDERSTAND THEM.—7. THE AUTO-PORTRAIT OF BOTH SAINTS.—8. GENTLENESS OF OUR HOLY FATHER.—9. CHARACTER OF ST. TERESA. WHY SHE UNDERTOOK THE WORK OF REFORM.—10. WHAT IS IMMUTABLE AND MUTABLE IN THE SPIRIT OF CARMEL?—11. IDEAS MUST NOT BE CONFUSED.—12. THE ESSENTIALS OF THE SPIRIT OF CARMEL CONTAINED IN THESE PRECAUTIONS. ALL OF THEM CAN BE OBSERVED BY EVERYBODY. THEY ARE ENOUGH TO SANCTIFY US.—13. THEY FACILITATE THE FULFILLMENT OF OTHER DUTIES.—14. ALL OF US HAVE NEED OF TAKING THEM WELL TO HEART.—15. WELL FIXED IN OUR CONSCIENCE. FOR THIS PURPOSE WE CAME TO THE ORDER.—16. THE SPIRIT OF CARMEL AND THE DAUGHTERS OF ST. TERESA.—17. THE LITTLE FLOWER. THE “ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL” AND THE “PRECAUTION.”—18. RELIGIOUS.—19. THIRD ORDER. SECULAR PERSONS AND THIS PRECAUTION. A LITTLE HEAVEN ON EARTH. FOUR MAXIMS TO A RELIGIOUS.

1. St. John of the Cross did not found a religious Order. But he was one of the principal

factors in the renovation of the most ancient Order of Carmel, where he was already professed, when instigated and guided by the great St. Teresa of Jesus, he commenced the glorious reform of Carmel. He had been formed according to the spirit of the old Prophetic Order. This marked vocation to which he so perfectly adapted and so entirely consecrated himself, like every great person who has a providential mission to fulfil, was not to establish new practices in the religious life, but to revive in all its pristine splendor the ancient spirit of the Order of the Blessed Virgin.

Consequently, in the instructions given by him to his first disciples is found the spirit of the Order to which Divine Providence called him, for the purpose of renewing the fervor of the old inmates of Carmel. It is enough to follow him from the moment he met St. Teresa of Jesus in Medina del Campo until his death, to be convinced that this was the predominant idea to which St. John of the Cross consecrated all his energy. To found new convents and to instruct by means of his writings and spiritual direction the souls who dwelt in them, this was the labor to which that privileged spirit devoted itself.

2. The fundamental doctrine of a general character which the holy Father gives as applicable to all who wish to live the spirit of Carmel, is to be found in his celebrated *Precautions* on which

we have just commented. His mystic works are dedicated to the privileged persons who are leading a life in accordance with the Gospel or the religious state, and who aspire to a very high degree of perfection. It is well known that few reach so far. The "Ascent of Mount Carmel," the first of these works, is of more or less general character; it will be read with much profit by all who desire to attain some religious perfection, though they may have not reached nor perhaps ever will reach any degree of supernatural contemplation. Nevertheless, our holy Father devotes this book to souls highly privileged within the religious state, as he tells us in the preface:

*My principal object is not to address myself to all, but only to certain persons of our holy Order of Mount Carmel, of the primitive observance; friars as well as nuns, who by the grace of God are on the pathway of this mount. It is at their request I have undertaken my task. They, indeed, already detached from the things of this life, will the better understand this doctrine of detachment of spirit.*

On the other hand the Precautions contain general principles of most complete perfection, which are not only proper but necessary to every religious person. They do not suppose that the person for whom they are intended is raised to any extraordinary degree of prayer or contemplation, but is animated by the good will of attaining religious or evangelical perfection. In

the preface to this book our saint remarks: *If he will do this with ordinary care and without other efforts or other practices, at the same time carefully observing the obligations of his state, he will advance rapidly to great perfection, obtain all virtues, and attain unto holy peace.* Then in a few pages he teaches all that a religious needs to know and practise to obtain religious perfection: *Without other efforts or other practices than those prescribed here, he will acquire all virtue.*

3. He considers these precautions not as mere advice which one can take or leave at will, but as real precepts of virtue which he believes necessary; for very often while formulating them he tells us: *If you do not observe this, you will never become a good religious. In no other way can you get rid of the imperfections and escape the evils which result to your soul from the intercourse with men; for having forgotten this a great many religious in the way of perfection are ruined by the devil.*

From all this we can infer that these precautions were in the mind of the holy writer, a brief compendium of all that persons desirous of obtaining evangelical perfection must necessarily practise. They are a brief abridgment of the genuine religious spirit, and this is the sole explanation for the present commentary.



4. There only remains now to study the characteristic of this religious spirit, to see how perfectly it harmonizes with the spirit of these precautions. The first principle and perfect model of the religious spirit is our Lord Jesus Christ. The holy Gospel is the fundamental rule of religious institutions; but the holy Prophet Elias had already outlined in himself and in his disciples the first strokes of religious perfection, and therefore he is considered the Father and Founder of the monastic life. And so in the most ancient Order of Carmel which recognizes and venerates him as its Father and Founder, must be found the distinctive characteristics of the true religious spirit. That of Elias, the first Parent of the Order of Carmel, is one of great austerity and ineffable suavity, of continuous retirement and prodigious enterprise. Coarse skins formed his vesture, the desert was his home, and his food what the ravens brought him. From those vast solitudes he contemplated in a beautiful symbol the grandeur of Mary Immaculate; and long before anybody else he venerated and caused others to venerate, the most pure Mother of chaste love and sweet hope. In the food and drink served him by the angel under a juniper tree on the mountains of Juda, he contemplated a perfect type of the Sacrament of love. Notwithstanding this ardent affection for solitude and conversation with God, whenever necessity compelled him, this man of God came out of the

depths of the desert to chastise the blasphemer, to rebuke kings and tyrants, and to remind the people of the fulfilment of their duties. The Almighty seems to have put into his hands all the elements of creation; to nobody before him had God given the power of raising men from the dead; he called fire down from heaven as often as it was necessary to prove his mission; he commanded the clouds not to send a drop of rain over Israel for three years and six months; later he ordered them to send fertilizing rains and they obeyed him. (1)

5. The self-same is the spirit of the Order of Carmel; these are the characteristics of all great religious personages, whatever may be the order to which they belong. Any new Ernest Hello who could and who wished to write "Physiognomies of Saints and Personages of Religious Orders," could present to his readers a most beautiful collection of religious physiognomies, and in all of them the characteristic spirit of Elias would be apparent.

Let me be permitted to present a few of these great figures who have so highly honored the religious life. Here is St. Benedict who flees from people and hides himself in the desert, that nobody should hear about him, and notwithstanding it was he and his monks who saved Christian civilization in Europe. The melifluous St. Ber-

(1) III Kings, XVII, XVIII, XIX.

nard, so humble, so retired, so austere, of whom it has been said that he alone bore all the weight of his century. The humble Brother of Asisi, sweet friend of the birds and of flowers, but at the same time possessed of such an energetic character and of such wonderful activity, that he was the mainspring of the religious, social, and moral revival of the Middle Ages, and whose influence after so many centuries is even today most powerfully felt in the world.

There is a St. Andrew Corsino, so humble, so retired, and if you wish so over cautious, that through fear of being honored with the episcopal dignity he fled and hid himself like a terrified child; and yet later on he became one of the greatest figures of the episcopate in the Middle Ages, the right hand of Pope Urban V, and a successful peacemaker of the agitated Italian cities.

St. Peter Thomas, the austere, humble, and retired religious of Condon, a man of familiar colloquies with the Queen of Heaven, and afterwards the most prudent counsellor of the Crusaders, the learned Patriarch of Constantinople, and the zealous apostle of the East. St. Angelo, a miracle of penance, passed five years hidden in the same desert which Jesus sanctified by His fast of forty days. This great Thaumaturgus who resuscitated several dead by a single touch of his mantle, became a most zealous apostle who converted innumerable sinners and vindicated outraged virtue, and finally had the ineffable happiness of

being martyred for the truth in the same pulpit from which he had so energetically exposed public corruption. Then there is St. Albert, the true Apostle of Sicily, a man of austere penance, with an estatic soul enjoying familiar intercourse with the Infant Jesus. St. Simon Stock, who passed twenty years entirely forgotten in the deserts of Great Britain, was one of the most brilliant geniuses of the ancient University of Oxford. He traveled through province and kingdoms evangelizing souls, erecting churches and monasteries, and finally obtained from the Immaculate Queen of Heaven through the Scapular, the most tender and consoling protection that man ever received from the Mother of God.

6. We can observe the same spirit in the two heavenly Reformers of Carmel. The old spirit of Elias was revived in all its vigor and perfection in St. Teresa of Jesus and in St. John of the Cross. In both the spirit is identical. But its elements do not appear at first sight with the same intensity and harmony in our holy Mother and in our blessed Father.

In our Mother, her charms as woman and as saint joined to her marvellous activity, cloak her great austerities and her intimate and ordinary intercourse with God. In our Father, the rigorously methodic and almost scholastic exposition of his severe teaching, his penitential life, and his affection for solitude, partially hide the exhaust-



less activity of his spirit and the rich treasure of tenderness and love which filled his soul.

Men are easily reconciled and readily admit the holiness and dignity of St. Teresa, because her incomparable charms of woman and writer, of a person of society and of business, do not permit them to see her austere doctrine and conduct and her wonderful prayer. Neither can they believe that the penitent solitary of Duruelo, the author of the "Precautions" and of the "Dark Night of the Soul," was a man gifted with unusual activity and with a heart richly endowed with tender love. Notwithstanding this, the spirit of both is exactly the same; both were cast in the same mould. The "Way of Perfection" and the "Mansions" or the "Interior Castle" can be compared to the "Ascent of Mount Carmel," the "Dark Night," and the "Spiritual Canticle" of St. John of the Cross, and it will be noticed on the one hand that the womanly and saintly traits of St. Teresa are charmingly interwoven with the greatest austerities of the religious life; on the other we perceive that the rigors of the solitary ascetic do not entirely conceal the vehement ardors of the man of fire, all inflamed with the love of God and of man.

7. Our holy Mother presents virtue as something lovable, easy, and agreeable; but the essential part of her doctrine is ardent love for sufferings, while her whole life was a miracle of

rigor and penance. For her this life had no attraction, except insofar as she could suffer and work for the love of God and the neighbor. She gives her own portrait in the following words: *Those who truly love God, love all that is good, favor all that is good, praise all that is good; they join always with the good, they love only the truth and things worthy of love. If the love of God is a true love, it is impossible to hide it.* (2)

Our holy Father on the other hand always presents himself as fleeing from men, he placed all his affections in suffering. At the same time this ecstatic saint is most active, he founded and governed many houses of prayer, fostered among his disciples the missionary spirit, and wrote many books which are still leading innumerable souls to a closer union with God.

He too portrays himself when he writes: *Devout souls run with youthful vigor. They run in many ways and in various directions—each according to the spirit which God bestows and the vocation He has given—in the diversified forms of spiritual services on the road of eternal life, which is evangelical perfection.* (3) These men will shed their heart's blood for him who serves God, and will help as much as they can those who serve Him. So great was St. John's energy that, placing his whole trust in God, he was never discour-

(2) Way of Perf. XXXX.

(3) Spir. Cant., Canticle XXV.

aged. This is his most beautiful thought: *Heavenly hope attains as much as it hopes for.*

8. His spirit is at one and the same time energetic and amiable. It is true, that his character seen from afar, seems more that of a hermit who flees from people than that of an apostolic man who tries to make himself all to all to gain all. It is certain that the famous "path to nothing," traced on his symbolic mountain to reach the summit of perfection, causes fear and discouragement, when it is not well understood. But at the same time he tells us that the Divine Shepherd passed, and as long as He lives in His Sacrament, is still passing over the roughness of this mountain and is climbing these paths in search of His beautiful shepherdess; by which name the gentle poet understands the whole of humanity; and so he sings with a tenderness that nobody ever has surpassed:

## I

*A shepherd is alone and in pain,  
Deprived of all pleasure and joy,  
His thoughts on His shepherdess intent,  
And his heart is by love most cruelly torn.*

## II

*He weeps, not because he is wounded with love  
And his distress brings him no pain,  
Though a wound is made in his heart,  
But he weeps because he thinks he is forgot.*

## III

*His beautiful shepherdess, so does he think,  
Has forgotten him; that thought alone  
Makes him suffer in the land of the stranger,  
And his heart is by love most cruelly torn.*

## IV

*The shepherd exclaims, "Ah wretch that I am,  
For I am abandoned and left.  
My presence is shunned by my love,  
And my heart for her love is most cruelly torn."*

## V

*At last he was raised on a tree,  
Where he opened his beautiful arms;  
On it he died,  
His heart by love most cruelly torn.*

Ah, what does it matter that he teaches a severe doctrine who can think and express himself thus! Who can so tenderly and worthily represent the august person of the Redeemer and the whole of humanity! His must have been a heart filled with an ineffable love towards God and his neighbor, and must necessarily be gifted with a great activity to work for God and for men; because love, when it is perfect, is a powerful stimulus as St. Paul says: *The charity of Christ presseth us.* (4)



The Ecstatic Doctor of Carmel was most severe with himself, but kind and gentle to every one else. He did not pretend to minimize the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which is really very austere. But he enveloped and softened it with the loving tenderness of his heart. He diligently cultivated an intimate intercourse with God, because he knew well that man must seek strength, the secret of success, from heaven. The fruit of his prayer appeared in doing all he could, and he could do much, for the glory of God and the benefit of his neighbor.

9. Likewise it was this twofold purpose that induced St. Teresa to begin the reform of Carmel; here are her own words: *I waited on our Lord always with my poor prayers, and got my sisters to do the same, and to have a zeal for the good of souls, and for the increase of the Church; they always edified every one who conversed with them, and herein my longings were satisfied.* (5) It was her earnest wish that the fruit of our prayers and of all our penances should be the desire of doing good to every one. And again: *After four years—I think a little more—there came to see me a Franciscan friar, Father Maldonado, a great servant of God, having the same desires that I had for the good of souls. He was able to carry his into effect, for which I envied him enough. He had just returned from the Indies.*

(5) Foundations I. 5.

*He began by telling me of the many millions of souls there perishing through want of instruction, and preached us a sermon encouraging us to do penance, and then went his way. I was so distressed because so many souls were perishing that I could not contain myself. I went to one of the hermitages, weeping much, and cried unto our Lord, beseeching Him to show me, when the devil was carrying so many away, how I might do something to gain a soul for His service, and how I might do something by prayer now that I could do nothing else. I envied very much those who for the love of God, could employ themselves in this work for souls, though they might suffer a thousand deaths. Thus, when I am reading in the lives of saints how they converted souls, I have more devotion, more tenderness, and envy than when I read all the pains of martyrdom they underwent; for this is an attraction which our Lord has given me; and I think He prizes more one soul, which by His mercy we have gained for Him through our prayer and labor than all the services we can render Him. (6).*

10. Behold here the vigorous Carmelite spirit; it is a union of great austerity and ineffable sweetness; a spirit commenced in Elias, continued in all the Carmelite saints, and acquiring its perfect personification in St. Teresa and in St. John of the Cross. This Carmelite spirit is to last through all generations, from St. Elias till

the end of the world; it has to live in different times and under changed circumstances, to be appropriated by austere men as well as by most delicate virgins. Consequently, it must contain in itself something immutable which is its substance or essence, and which at the same time can be so mutable, so accommodating, that without being changed or lost it can adapt itself to different classes of persons as well as to different times, climates, and nations.

The first or essential part of this spirit must be immutable, intangible, under the penalty of our ceasing to be what we are. In both physical and moral things there are essential conditions, apart from which the thing will cease to be what it was. But what is not essential, only expedient, what is necessary for specified times and circumstances, this can be modified by legitimate authority according to the needs of time and place.

11. To confuse these ideas in any religious institute, would entail fatal consequences. To mistake what is immutable and essential for what is circumstantial and mutable, or vice versa, would suffice to throw into disorder all the energies of a corporation, to make its very existence impossible, except in determinate circumstances. A mistaken and narrow standard would result in condemning an institution to perpetual barrenness; the greatest efforts of its best members to accommodate themselves to the variable circumstances, would necessarily render their work in-



efficacious; since the institution, notwithstanding that its origin and its end is from God, depends upon human agency for its activity.

12. It is then only the essentials of the religious spirit that are contained in the booklet known as the *Precautions* of St. John of the Cross. If one frequently meditates on these instructions, it will be seen that there is not one which is not very necessary for the acquisition of solid virtue and evangelical perfection to which all those who have consecrated themselves to God are bound to aspire. And there is no religious person whatever may be his condition, who cannot observe perfectly each and every one of them, notwithstanding the circumstances of place, time and occupation. Prelates and subordinates, the healthy and the infirm, all can observe these precepts of our holy Father.

Let us add that these *Precautions* are like the strong and invigorating element of the Carmelite religious spirit, in which all the different practices of the religious life can be moulded. Religious men and women, Tertiaries of all kinds and even seculars who are lovers of perfection, can most perfectly appropriate the robust spirit of the *Precautions*. It is certain that whoever observes them exactly, will the better fulfil his other special obligations. For as St. John of the Cross says: *He who keeps faithfully these instructions delivers himself from all the impediments which created things put in his way, and*



*defends himself against the wiles and deceits of the devil.*

But it is not enough to observe some and neglect others, for the enemies against whom they are intended cannot be conquered separately. And therefore, *if we do not conquer the three, we shall never perfectly conquer one; and if we conquer one, we shall also conquer the others in the same proportion.* Persons who take these instructions to heart will fulfil exactly the rest of their obligations, since these instructions far from being an obstacle will prove a powerful incentive. There is no circumstance in life where some or several of them cannot be practised at the same time. Blessed is he who *takes them well to heart*, for without any other practices or exercises of virtue he will soon attain to perfect peace of soul, or as St. John of the Cross puts it: *He will enjoy the peaceful refreshment of the Holy Ghost.*

13. The Carmelite Sister loving the teaching of her holy Father and longing to fulfil it, will accommodate herself to any place, occupation, or character; for the contradictions which may present themselves will only be excellent opportunities to practise what she, a child of the great saint, has well taken to heart. And the Carmelite Fathers and Brothers who have in like manner taken well to heart all and every one of these precautions, will easily accommodate themselves to the various circumstances in which their duties may place them. Then we can do and bear all things with

resignation and even with pleasure, and however adverse the circumstances may be, they will provide us with excellent opportunities to exercise these precautions. Regular observance with its monotony affords us always and everywhere opportunities for sacrifices, little in themselves but continuous and very pleasing to God. In our relations with the neighbor, whether in the exercise of our ministry or in social intercourse, the remembrance of these counsels will make us less human and more apostolic, then neither the vain adulations of the rich nor the often unpleasant intercourse with the poor, will be able to withdraw us from our duty; there will be no pride in our success, no envy at that of others, nor any depression in our downfalls or contradictions.

14. For persons who have reached or who expect to reach a very high degree of contemplation, these precautions will serve as a counterbalance that they may not be lost in a world of fantastic ideals. They are none the less needed by those who never deviate from the simplicity and monotony of a regular and obscure life, to prevent them from falling into weariness and despondency. They are however most necessary for those who are ordinarily occupied with external works; for whom they will be a powerful reminder to oblige them to live within the sanctuary of their own hearts, lest calling and inducing others to fulfil their duties, they themselves become, according to the expression of St.

Paul: *as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.* The stars of the firmament in order to move rapidly and harmoniously without mutually hampering each other, require that their centripetal force be in perfect harmony with their centrifugal force. The same harmony of forces is necessary in the heaven of the human soul. These precautions always calling man within to those mysterious mansions of the spirit, establish also this perfect harmony in all the actions of man.

Whoever will take these precautions deeply to heart and not deviate much or little from the road marked out by them, will unfold all the energies of his spirit without any danger and with much advantage to himself and others, and this in whatever circumstances he may be placed. He will work faithfully, purely, and entirely for God, and therefore will always bear within himself a full kingdom, as our holy Father says: *The work purely and entirely done for God from a pure heart, makes a full kingdom for the Master.* (6)

15. It will cost us a little trouble to take these precautions well to heart, because they presuppose very solid virtue; but for us who desire to live according to the spirit of Carmel, it is absolutely necessary to have them at least well set in our conscience, in order that if we do not use them as wings to mount to a very high perfection, they may at least serve as a plank which we may seize

(6) Max. 21.

in moments of crisis and tempest in the religious life.

There can be no trial however hard, for which one or other of the precautions will not be appropriate. We know that we must observe each and every one of them, for it is not enough to defend ourselves against one of our enemies and allow the others to attack us at their pleasure. St. John of the Cross considers them so necessary that without them, he says, we cannot obtain peace of soul. With these precautions well fixed in our conscience, it will be easy in moments of trial to imagine we hear our holy Father saying to us kindly but firmly when we complain: *Why do you complain, my son? Why is this work so burdensome to you? Why do you find this companion so trying? Is it because your self-love has been humbled and wounded? Why have you no taste for your devotions and your occupations? It was to suffer all these hardships, that you promised to follow Jesus over the dolorous road, bearing your cross; and to do it with perfection you came here to the house of God. If it was not for this, then there was no reason to enter religion and you should have remained in the world, seeking its consolations, its honors, and its reputation and liberty.* These severe words cannot fail to be a powerful inducement for all those who have retained the spirit of their vocation, to continue the struggle with their weaknesses and discouragements.



16. The robust and sound spirituality contained in these precautions is a continual attraction drawing us inwardly, and at the same time a marvelous expansion toward all that is for the glory of God and the good of souls, it contains so many exterior austerities and such ineffable interior sweetness. This is the spirit preached by St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross and which they handed down to their children. Their success was wonderful, for the reform of Carmel, especially in the first century after its reformation, was simply marvelous. The Discalced Sisters proved that they were the true daughters of these two great saints. St. Teresa used to say that she did not want her daughters to be womanish at all. With manly fortitude they not only established themselves throughout Spain, but crossing the frontiers and even the seas, they rectified the opinion of many faint-hearted men, and demonstrated to them, as they have continued to the present, that the daughters of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross are able to cultivate luxuriantly in any clime and in any nation, the most delicate flowers which the great Saint planted in her first little garden of St. Joseph at Avila.

Any observer who visits in any nation a convent of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters will have occasion to notice in many of them the delicate spirit of our holy Father. There is scarcely a convent of our Sisters where there is not some

privileged soul of God. The world knows it and therefore it appreciates them.

17. In our day Divine Providence ordained that one of these delicate flowers of the Carmelite garden should be shown to the world. This our lack-a-day world, notwithstanding its deviation from the right, feels a strong desire for genuine spirituality. It is never weary admiring the *Little Flower*, as she is called here, or the *Little Flower of Jesus* as she is styled by the editors of her "Autobiography," which has reached many editions in almost all the languages of the world. From ample experience and knowledge we do not exaggerate when we say, that there are throughout the gardens of Carmel many, perhaps hundreds, of Little Flowers, as beautiful and delicate as that of Lisieux. That Providence conceals them from the gaze of the world does not lessen their intrinsic beauty. In connection with this *Little Flower of Jesus*, of whom we are an ardent and enthusiastic admirer, we confess we do not see anything extraordinary in her; she is a perfect daughter of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross and nothing more.

We do not know if the critical history or the intimate life of this admirable soul is written or not. But we dare to venture an opinion without fear of its being gainsaid. Let us lay aside for the moment her characteristic notes which are due to her class, her formation, and her education, and

which do not affect the essentials of virtue; so also the special strokes which are the result of temperament, of environment; and especially let her be divested of the accoutrements in which she has been enveloped, and which form so great a charm for many of the admirers of the *Little Saint*. Now let our attention be paid only to the interior of this soul: let us study her fundamental thoughts which are the genuine expression of her conscience and her moral personality, and it will be seen that they are nothing else than the doctrine of St. John of the Cross well understood and put into practice. She herself says *that she drew much light from the works of St. John of the Cross and that during some time the only food of her soul was the writings of our holy Father*. (7) For us the substance of that admirable *History*, her *Letters* and *Poetry* are only the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Precautions* well taken to heart, and perfectly lived, and then narrated by a young French lady of the educated class.

18. The first Carmelite Fathers and Brothers certainly did not remain behind their Sisters. They also assimilated perfectly the spirit of their holy Father and holy Mother. Men of great prayer and gifted with the spirit of enterprise, they filled the deserts with penitents and with innumerable volumes the libraries, and extended throughout the world their apostolic zeal and mis-

(7) History of a Soul VII.

sionary spirit. The Venerable Fathers Jerome Gratian, Thomas of Jesus, Peter of the Mother of God, John of Jesus, Dominic of Jesus Mary, and so many others, were doubtless true children of our holy Mother and our holy Father. Their spirit of penance and interior recollection were in perfect harmony with their great zeal which produced such marvelous works. A biographic history of these great men, well written and purified from the bad taste of the times in which they were composed, would be of untold value for our emulation and encouragement.

The Reform of Carmel passed during the last two centuries through many vicissitudes. Political disturbances during those times did more harm to Carmel than to any other order, due to the very nature of its spirit. Formed of elements apparently antagonistic, it is easy to mistify or misunderstand it, and mistakes in this order of ideas are always fatal. But notwithstanding the adversity of the times, the work of St. Teresa of Jesus and of St. John of the Cross among men is not yet dead, it is reviving with admirable freshness and vigor. Our Missions in America and Asia are today as flourishing as ever. The sons of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross erected many temples during the last quarter of the preceding century in honor of God and the most Blessed Mother of Carmel.

Vocations are not wanting either, notwithstanding the great austerities of the Order. Hundreds



of young men and maidens with vigorous mind and ardent heart desire to imitate these two great figures of Carmel. With a pure heart and bearing the cross for their model and symbol, they hope to sustain what is commenced and to open up new horizons. They will surely obtain it if they impress well on their heart and their spirit the robust asceticism of these *Precautions*. Here is found as it were in germ the whole Carmelite spirit. Let us assimilate well all that is contained in the *Precautions*, and there is no doubt that all the activities and energies which the spirit of the sons of St. John of the Cross can contain, will be unrolled in perfect harmony and with most certain results for the glory of God and their own sanctification.

19. The Discalced Fathers and Mothers of our Lady of Mount Carmel are not the only children of St. John of the Cross; we are the first born, but not the only sons. We must also include those multitudes of persons who, known as Tertiaries, belong to the different religious institutes aggregated the first Order of Carmel, and who desire to live according to the Carmelite spirit. All these persons, whatever may be their condition in life, can apply to themselves the perfection contained in these admirable precautions. There is not one counsel among them which cannot be applied most expediently to every religious person in whatever circumstance in life. In fact all that has been said

in this Commentary is applicable to all religious persons of whatever institution or congregation.

20. Moreover, there are very many persons who, living in their own homes, are affiliated to the Order of Carmel as Tertiaries or as Members of the Confraternity. And it is evident that they will not be satisfied with merely having their names inscribed in their respective registers, but they too desire to live according to the spirit of Carmel, for it is in the spirit and not in the register that true affiliation consists. The best means to live according to that spirit is to plan out a rule of life according to these wise maxims of St. John of the Cross. They are perfectly adaptable to secular persons no less than to those who live in communities. Like all works of great merit, this booklet of our holy Father is of universal application.

Not to interfere in other people's affairs unless obliged by justice or charity; to refrain from the immoderate desire of riches; to restrain the heart within severe laws that it may not be poured out and wasted, but that it may preserve its heat and energy: are things certainly most suitable for every one whatever may be his state or condition. And this is what St. John of the Cross recommends in his first three precautions.

The spirit of obedience to the law and to those who in some way are our superiors, and this without any consideration to their personal qualities, attending only to the fulfilment of what they com-

mand us, is an absolutely necessary condition if peace and perfect harmony are to reign, not only in religious houses, but also in homes and in human society in general. Without the spirit of submission it is impossible to preserve peace anywhere, no matter what the social condition of the persons implied. This perfect submission degrades nobody, on the contrary it dignifies; because here a man does not subject himself to the caprice of another man but to the dictates of his conscience, which commands us to obey those who hold any legitimate authority. But this is not possible without great humility, rightly understood and truthfully practised. This is the lesson contained in the three precautions against the devil.

What renders family life and in general human intercourse more difficult is the difference of character among persons. Now St. John of the Cross teaches us how we should diminish and even entirely destroy this great enemy of peace among men. He wants us to consider these disturbing differences of character, as the most excellent and efficacious means given us by a loving Providence, as a help to purify us from our defects. The home where these precautions are well observed, will most certainly be a happy mansion of peace, a bit of heaven here on earth. There are some such homes. Would to God that there were many more such asylums of pure domestic love, sanctified by abnegation and continual sac-

rifice! Then social peace would be possible and even comparatively easy.

Finally, the last precaution commands us to learn how to despise pleasure and make ourselves superior to suffering. We are even told to desire suffering, considering the great power that Divine Providence has given to suffering to aid in our sanctification.

Whoever meditates a little on the precautions will understand quite easily that they are expedient not only for persons living in religious institutions, but also for all those who love strong and sound morality; in a word for all those who know how to appreciate the charming beauties of Christian virtues.



FOUR MAXIMS TO A RELIGIOUS FOR ATTAINING  
PERFECTION

*Your holy charity (1) has asked much of me in a few words. This would require much paper and time, and not having either of them at my disposal, I shall endeavor to summarize and write only some points or maxims which will contain much in few words; whoever observes them perfectly will attain to high perfection. Whoever would desire to be a true religious and live according to the obligations he has promised to God, to advance in virtue and enjoy the peace and consolations of the Holy Ghost, has to exercise himself most carefully in the following four maxims: 1st. Resignation; 2nd. Mortification; 3rd. Exercise of virtues; 4th. Corporal and spiritual solitude.*

(1) This is the manner of addressing the brethren.

## FIRST MAXIM.

*To observe the first, which is resignation, it is proper he should live in the monastery as if no other person lived in it; therefore he should never interfere in thought or word with things that happen in the community nor with individuals, nor desiring to notice what is good or evil, nor even their manners. Were the world to sink, he should not notice or interfere with them in order to preserve his soul in peace; remembering the wife of Lot, who because she looked back to observe the clamor of those who perished, was converted into a hard stone. It is necessary to observe this with great energy, for it will free him from many sins and imperfections, he will enjoy peace and tranquility of soul, and make great progress before God and man. Remark this well, for it is most important; many religious for not observing this, not only were not distinguished for their exercise of virtuous actions, but always went back, falling from bad to worse.*

## SECOND MAXIM.

*To practice the second maxim, which is mortification, and to profit by it, it is proper for him to understand well this truth, that he came to the convent to be polished and exercised in virtue, and that he is like the stone which is hewn and polished before being set in the edifice. So he must know that all those who live in the convent are officers of God who will polish and exercise him in mortification. Some will polish him by words, saying things he does not wish to hear; others by actions, doing things he does not like to suffer; others by manners, being rough and harsh in themselves and in their manners; others again by thought, making him think or feel that they do not esteem or love him. All these mortifications and hardships he has to bear with interior patience, holding his tongue for the love of God, understanding that he came to the convent for no other purpose than to be polished and thus become worthy of Heaven. If it was not for this, there was no reason for him to become a religious, he should rather have staid in the world seeking its pleasures, honors, and liberty.*

*This second maxim is absolutely necessary if a religious wants to fulfil his duties, attain true*

*humility, interior peace, and the consolations of the Holy Ghost. If he does not observe it, he will not know how to be a religious, nor why he came to the convent; nor will he know how to seek Christ but himself alone; nor will he find peace of soul; nor will he cease committing many sins, disturbing himself often; for occasions will never be wanting in convents. God does not permit them to be wanting, as He brings souls there to exercise and purify them like the gold in the fire; it is expedient then that there be hardships and temptations from men and devils and fire of anguish and afflictions. In these things a religious must exercise himself, always trying to bear them patiently and resigned to the will of God, and not in such a way that instead of receiving God's approbation and blessing, he merits His reprobation for not carrying the cross of Christ with patience. Many religious for not understanding that they came into religion for this purpose, bear annoyances badly; but at the time of reckoning these will be much confounded and humiliated.*



### THIRD MAXIM.

*To practise the third, which is the exercise of virtue, it is necessary to be constant in the works of religion and obedience without any regard to the world, doing things only for God. He should perform them in this manner and without any deception, never fixing his attention on the pleasure or displeasure he finds in them, but only on the motive of doing them for God. Thus he must do all things with the single object of thereby serving God.*

*To act with this fortitude and constancy, and speedily to acquire virtue, let him always be careful to incline more to what is hard than easy, more to what is rigorous than mild, more to what is painful and irksome in its performance than what is delightful and pleasant, and not to choose the lightest cross because it is a light burden; the heavier the burden, the lighter it becomes if carried for God's sake. Let him also aim that his brethren be preferred to him in all easy works, putting himself always in the lowest place and this with all his heart, because this is the way of becoming spiritually great, as Our Lord tells us in His Gospel: Who humbles himself will be exalted (2).*

#### FOURTH MAXIM.

*To practise the fourth, which is solitude, it is expedient to consider all wordly things as if they did not exist; and if at any time he must unavoidably deal with them, let him act with as much detachment as if they did not exist.*

*Let him have no concern about external things in the world, for God has delivered him from them; the business that can be transacted by a third person, let him not do it by himself, for it is best for him not to wish to see anybody nor to be seen by any one. And let him remember well that if God on the day of reckoning will exact a strict account for every idle word from an ordinary Christian, how much more so from a religious whose life and actions are consecrated to Him!*

*This does not mean that he is to neglect the duties of his office, or any other his superior may give him, on the contrary he must fulfil them with all diligence and care; but it means that he performs them in such a manner that while executing them he preserves himself free from any fault; this is what God and his superior demand of him. For this purpose let him be constant in prayer, not ceasing even in the midst of corporal exercises; whether he eat, whether he drink, or speak, or deal with seculars, or does any other thing, let*

*him always long for God, having his heart reposing in Him. This is most necessary for interior solitude, which does not permit the soul to set its thoughts on anything which is not God or connected with Him, which demands forgetfulness of all things that are or happen in this miserable life. Let him not desire to know anything, except how to serve God better and keep more faithfully the rules of his institute.*

*If your charity will observe carefully these four maxims, in a very short time you will become perfect, for these maxims so help each other that, if you fail in one of them, you lose what you gained by the faithful observance of the other three.*

*LAUS DEO VIRGINIQUE MATRI.*









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